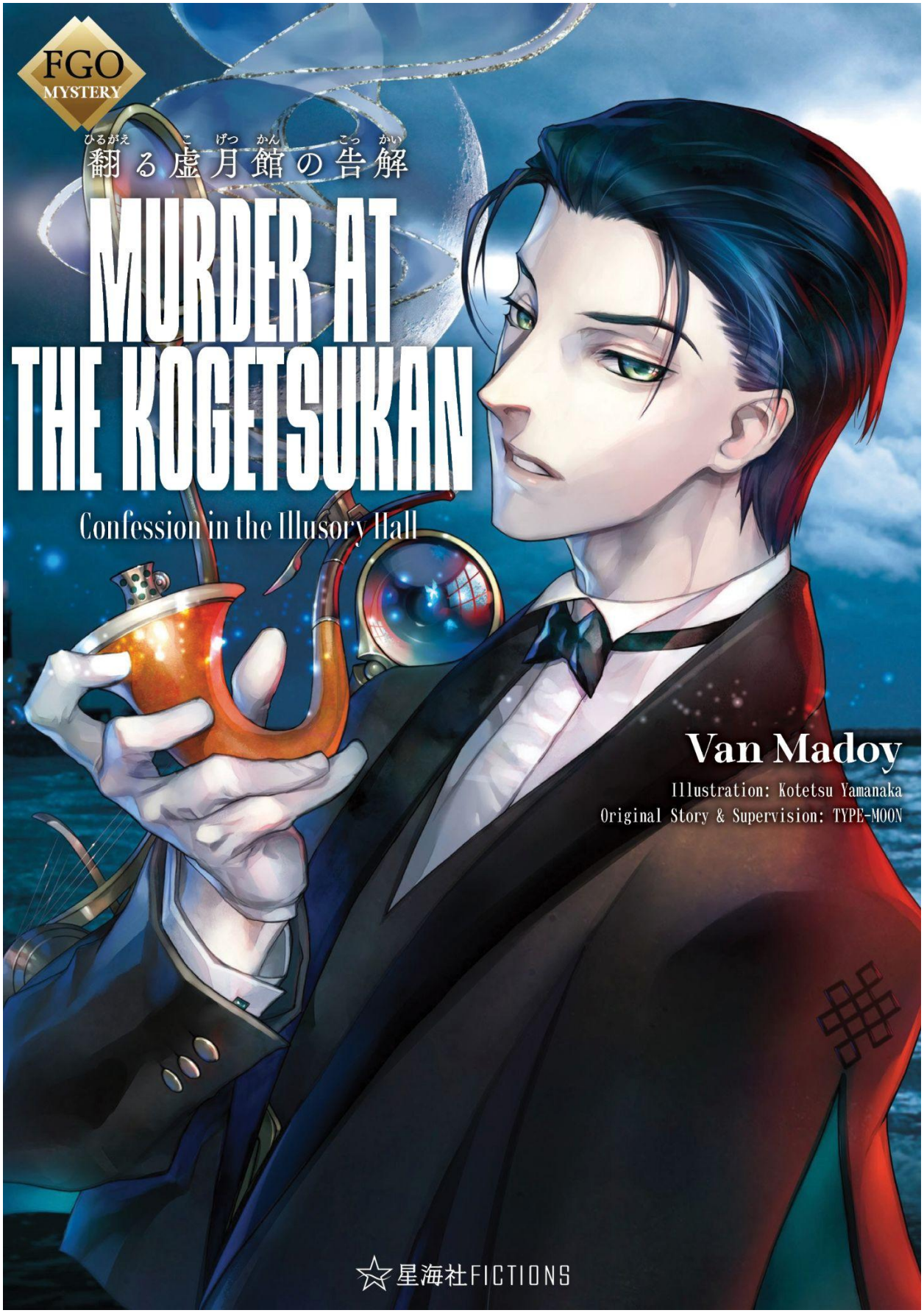
FGO
MYSTERY
翻る虚月館の告解
MURDER AT THE KOGETSUKAN
Confession in the Illusory Hall
Van Madoy
Illustration: Kotetsu Yamanaka
Original Story & Supervision: TYPE-MOON
☆星海社FICTIONS

This is a fan translation of the original novel *FGO Mystery - Hirugaeru Kogetsukan no Kokkai: Kogetsukan Satsujin Jiken*. However, most dialogue translation will be using the official English text by Aniplex USA found within the original in-game event "Murder at the Kogetsukan" in the English version of *Fate/Grand Order*. All new text (ex: narration, additional dialogue, etc.) or edited lines from outside the original event were translated, proofread and edited by me, with proofreading help from friends.

I have also taken the liberty of including certain important illustrations made for the original event that were not given illustrations within the novel, as to create a more complete version for you to enjoy.

Distribution of this English translation of this novel is strictly not for profit, nor should you ever have to pay money for it. If you did, I suggest you obtain a refund and report the unlawful sale of this book immediately.

With these formalities out of the way, please enjoy. Whether you're a returning Master or have never set foot into the world of *F/GO*, I hope this mystery is able to keep you entertained until the end.

-*Mysterious Bookkeeper L*

FGO Mystery

Murder at the Kogetsukan: Confession in the Illusory Hall

Van Madoy

Illustration: Kotetsu Yamanaka
Translation: Mysterious Bookkeeper L
Aniplex USA (Unofficially)

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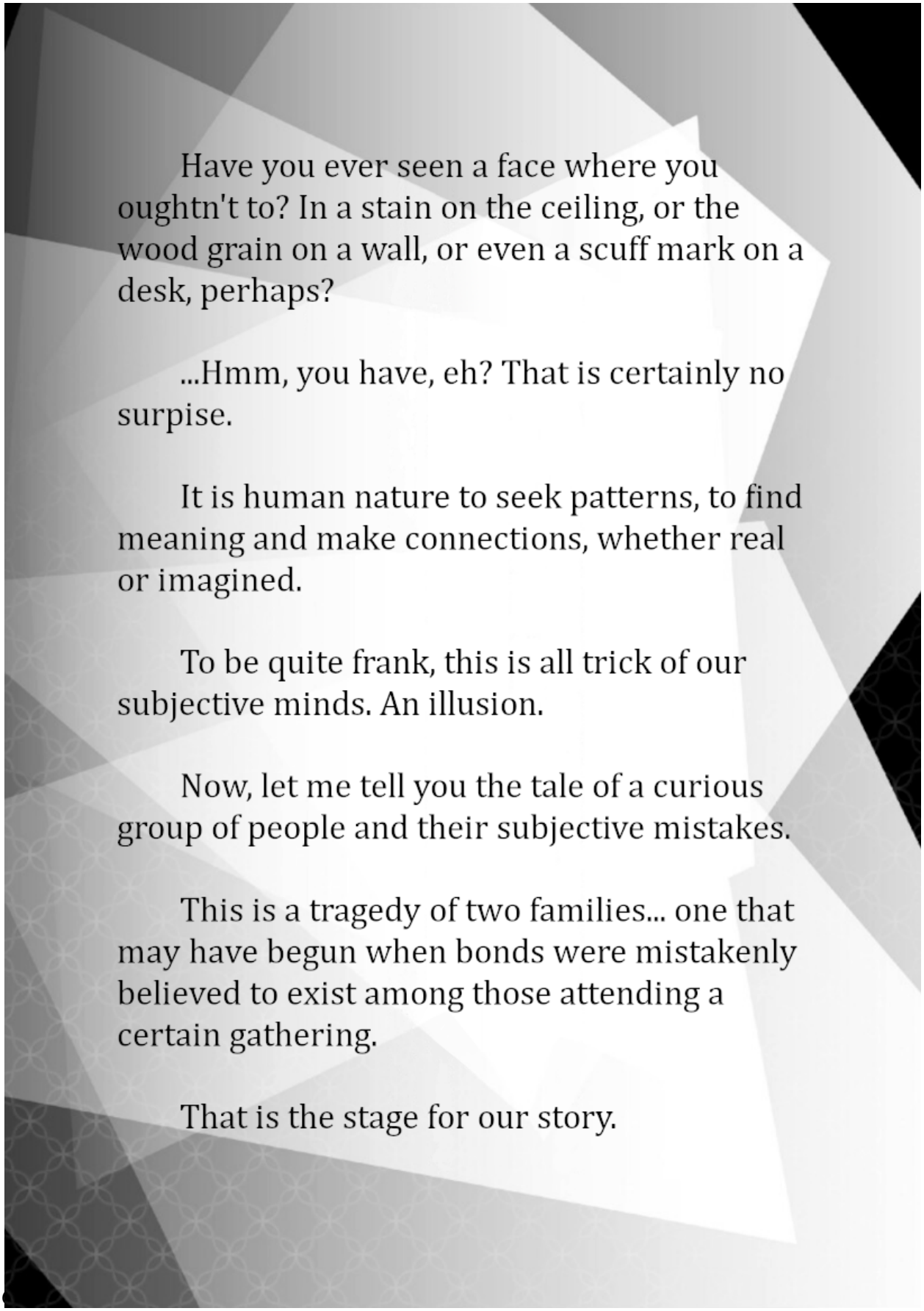
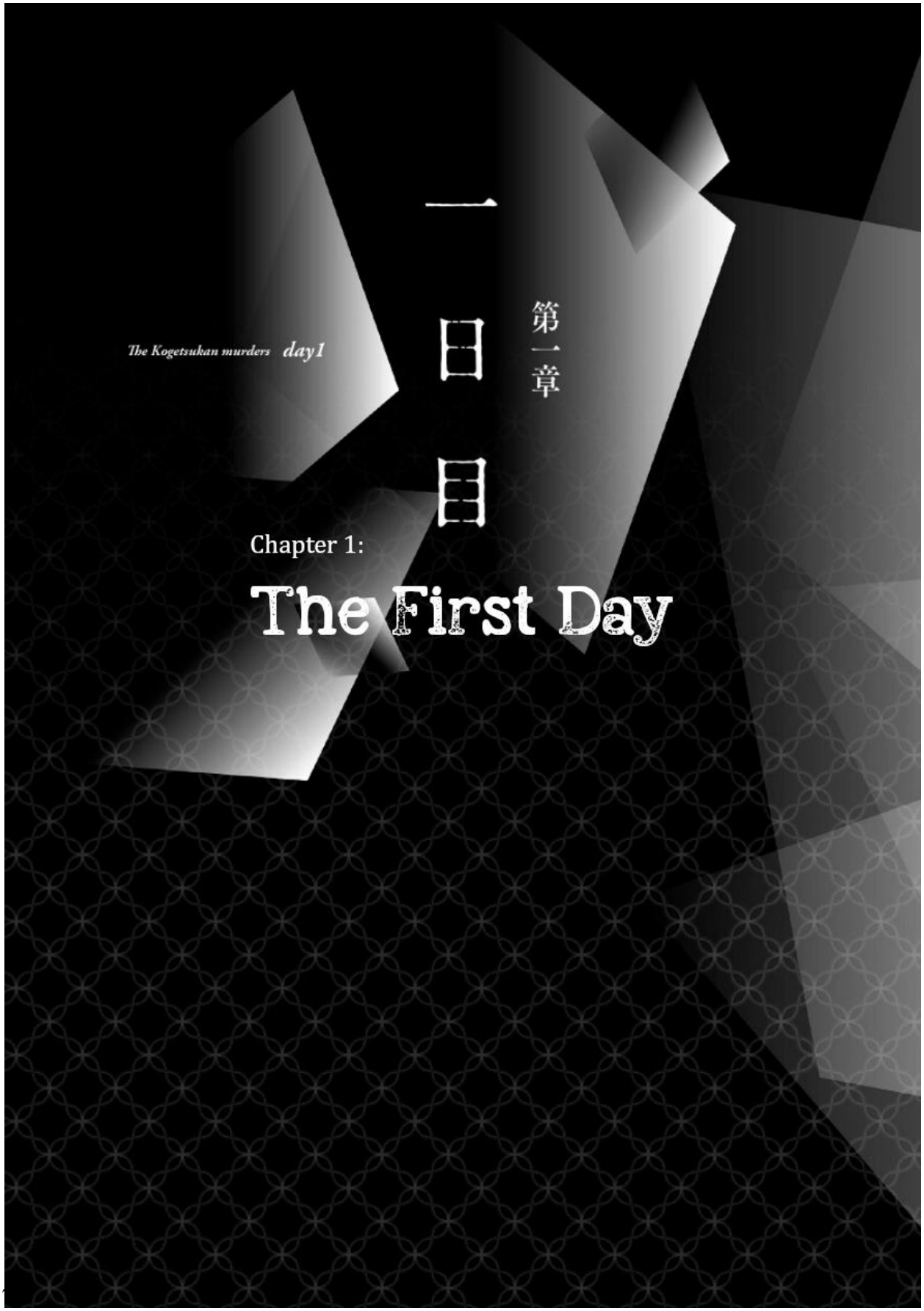

Have you ever seen a face where you oughtn't to? In a stain on the ceiling, or the wood grain on a wall, or even a scuff mark on a desk, perhaps?
...Hmm, you have, eh? That is certainly no surpise.
It is human nature to seek patterns, to find meaning and make connections, whether real or imagined.
To be quite frank, this is all trick of our subjective minds. An illusion.
Now, let me tell you the tale of a curious group of people and their subjective mistakes.
This is a tragedy of two families... one that may have begun when bonds were mistakenly believed to exist among those attending a certain gathering.
That is the stage for our story.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Chapter 1:
The First Day

Chapter 1: The First Day

Waking up, the first thing I saw was an unfamiliar ceiling. As humans, our brains remember the last sight seen before going to sleep to compare it with the first sight seen when we wake up. If they don't match up, the natural response is to feel a wave of anxiety.

…So, where the heck am I? I sit up in a panic, looking around. From the look of the room, this place seems to be a high-end resort hotel, yet I unfortunately don't remember ever coming to one. I should have been… ah, right, in my room at Chaldea. As I continued looking around, I noticed that there was a small woman standing nearby.

"My, you're awake now?" said the woman casually.

Reflexively, I affirmed her comment hurriedly. Stheno, the eldest of the three terrifying Gorgon sisters… There's nothing I'd like less than to anger her.

"….—theno?" I try to say her name, but something stops it from fully forming. Putting my hand to my throat, I find a bandage fastened around it, yet another thing I don't remember doing.

"And whose name is that? Are you still half-asleep or something?" the woman responded with her eyebrow raised. Taking a better look at her, while I can't shake the similarity to Stheno, she does seem to be a different person. Unfortunately, that doesn't get me any closer to knowing her name.

Seemingly giving up on waiting for me to say it, she finally introduces herself. "…My name's Juliet. Juliet Violet." Juliet… that's a good name. Yet even after learning it, I still can't remember anything about her. Just what is this place? I remember that I'm Ritsuka Fujimaru, and that I'm a Master at Finis Chaldea, The Organization for the Preservation of Human Order… or at least I'm supposed to be…

Anxiety welling up in me once again, I search the room with my eyes and notice a large mirror. I don't even remember what I'm wearing, and it also seems that I'm injured in some way. Wanting to get a grip on my current situation, I get out of bed and stand opposite of the figure within the mirror.

Just… who is that…?

Reflected in the mirror was a complete stranger. Unfamiliar blonde hair and the light blue eyes staring back at me made it abundantly clear that I was no longer myself. My mind starts rejecting the reality before me, and a stinging pain in the back of my head forces me to sit back down on the bed once again.

"Hey, really, are you okay?" Juliet asked, noticing something was clearly wrong. As she looked into my eyes, her previous stubbornness was replaced with an expression of worry. I'm not quite sure how to put it into words, but despite just meeting her I can already tell she's a nice girl.

"Do… you know who you are?" she asks me, and I simply shake my head in reply. "Alright… Well, your name is Rikka Fujimahr. We go to the same college, and you ditched class so you could come with me on our four-day family trip. Remember?" Despite having all this explained to me, nothing sparks any memories. "Hmm, it looks like none of this is ringing a bell, huh? It's May 2017— Oh no, that face you're making… You really have forgotten, haven't you?" Juliet knelt on the bed, leaning in closer to me. "You said that you'll stay with me no matter what, right? Remember?"

I have no idea how to respond. I don't even know what kind of relationship we're supposed to have in the first place! As I weigh my options on what to say, I hear the door to the room open. Juliet, noticing this, quickly pulls herself back from me.

"Just hurry up and come back already…" she grumbles, before remembering something. Putting her hand to my ear, she whispers, "Oh, your vocal cords are damaged and you can't speak. Try not to open your mouth until they're healed, got it?"

I'm barely able to nod before I notice a man who looks uncannily like Professor James Moriarty standing behind Juliet.

A look of understanding comes over his face, and he remarks, "Ah, my apologies, am I interrupting something? Should I perhaps smoke a while longer outside?"

"O-of course not! Nothing like that!" Juliet replies, reminding me with a look that I'm not to say anything unnecessary, as she just told me. "Besides, Doctor, Rikka's condition is worse than I thought. He can't remember anything."

"I see, so in addition to the previous throat injury, now we have an issue regarding the head. How unfortunate… In any case, let me take a look and see what I can do." The doctor, as she called him, approached me and briefly examined my throat as well as the back of my eyelids.

"Ah, this is why head injuries are so scary. You appear to have developed a mild case of amnesia," the gentleman with Moriarty's face said with a mournful look as he finished my medical examination, "I suppose an introduction is in order, then. My name is Hawthorne. I'm the Violet family's doctor."

So despite having the appearance of Moriarty, his name is Hawthorne… Alright, I think I've got it. Though, if the cast of characters keeps increasing like this, will I really be able to remember them all?

"I believe I've been at this job for about twenty years or so? I'm afraid my memory isn't what it used to be, much to my chagrin." From his soothing tone, he seems like an upright man, markedly different from the Moriarty I know.

"Is Rikka going to be okay, Doctor?"

"His condition doesn't seem to be serious, but you can't take head injuries lightly. One can seem to be in perfect health one day, then collapse the next. As a doctor, I'm afraid I can't give him a clean bill of health just yet. If he starts to feel bad again, make sure you call for me at once."

As soon as Hawthorne was finished speaking, the door swung open once more. When I turned to see what could have blown it open, Mephistopheles was in the doorway.

"Oh good, you're awake. Ahahaha, are you feeling all right now, Rikka?" Despite his appearance portraying him as a clown-like young man, the voice and tone of the person speaking from the door seemed surprisingly younger. I can't help but wonder just how he's connected to Juliet and Hawthorne.

"Is that all you've got to say, Cain!? You're the one who hit him with that ball in the first place!"

"Oh yeah, I guess I did, huh? Sorry about that," the young(?) boy, apparently named Cain, said, offering a halfhearted apology to me. From the way they interacted, I could hazard a guess that he's Juliet's little brother. Though, Mephistopheles seemed a bit too large to be Stheno's little brother. No, wait, thinking about it, the goddess Stheno is much older than him in reality, isn't she?

"Everything good now that I've apologized? Great! Then I'm gonna get back to the game!" Cain cheerfully remarked as he bounded out of the room.

"Ugh. I'm sorry about my little brother. You'd think he'd finally grow up a little now that he's in high school, but nope…"

I shake my head in response. Regardless of how it happened, maybe I could have paid more attention and avoided the ball, so I feel I'm partly to blame for this as well.

"Don't feel like you have to go easy on him, okay? He could have seriously hurt you," Juliet responds back with a puzzled look on her face. "It was bad enough that Cain kicked that ball into your face, but then it tripped you up and you ended up tumbling down the nearby stairs like a barrel. Remember?"

Honestly, when I heard that I got hit with a ball, I expected to have just been hit in the back of the head, but I guess reality is much more cruel than my imagination…

"I'm not sure what I would do to him if I were in your shoes, but you just laughed it off with a joke about him becoming a pro soccer player someday. I couldn't believe it." Wow, despite not remembering that, it does sound like something I would say. Try to condemn the crime, not the criminal, especially if the person who hurt you didn't do it intentionally… "That's one of your best qualities, though. You've always been good at finding the silver lining."

Even so, now I've got to deal with the fact that I've lost my memory thanks to his blow to my head… Wait, I still don't even know where we are! Taking yet another glance around, all the furnishings in the room look pretty expensive. Staying here would probably cost a pretty penny.

"You've even forgotten where we are, haven't you?" Juliet asked sadly, to which I shook my head apologetically. "Uh-oh… You might have it worse than I thought. This is the Kogetsukan." The Kogetsukan… As I expected, I've never heard the name before. Juliet, undeterred, attempted to continue her explanation regardless, "You're here with my family on our—"

Just as Juliet was about to explain why we're here fully, two women entered the room. To my eyes they looked to be Euryale and Minamoto-no-Raikou, but from their hair color and the atmosphere they gave off, I could easily imagine them to be Juliet's family. Though, despite being the middle sister of the Gorgon Sisters, Euryale and Stheno are almost identical in terms of appearance. Hopefully their personalities are different enough so that I can distinguish between the two…

"Oh good, you look like you're all right," the woman with the appearance of Raikou said as they entered.

"Oh, hello, Eva."

"I was so worried after I heard what Cain did. I'm glad to see you seem fine."

"Ah, Harriet, you're here as well. You're as radiant as ever… or rather, you both look especially beautiful today, I should say!"

"Heheh, maybe that's because I just got out of the bath."

From the conversation between Hawthorne and the two, I could tell that Harriet is in the form of Euryale, and Eva is in the form of Raikou, though their exact relation to Juliet is still a mystery.

"That's my mom, and my little sister. I'd have thought that was obvious… Maybe there's not as much family resemblance as I thought?" Juliet, seeing my confusion, whispered to me casually. I see, then Eva must be her mother and Harriet must be her sister.

"Why don't you go take a bath too, Juliet? The bathhouse is really spacious, much nicer than the tubs with our rooms," Harriet suggests to Juliet, but she just brushes it off.

"Maybe later, I'll be fine."

"Now, now, you mustn't let your appearance slide over something like this. Haven't you noticed your hair getting sticky from the ocean breeze?" Eva chimed in, brushing her long, beautiful hair. She's terrifyingly persuasive, even just with a glance.

"Not really. It's not like I've been to the beach."

Hawthorne, who had been watching the conversation between the three with interest, slyly said to me from the side, "I must say, it's always fascinating to see twins with such… different personalities." Of course! As an 'original character', so-to-speak, it makes sense that Juliet could be a twin. Hawthorne is right, too, it is pretty interesting that they're so different.

"Can you all come with me for a moment?" A man borrowing Lancelot's face had barged into the room. He's a very handsome man, but he had a somewhat helpless quality to his voice.

"Daddy?"

"What is it, Adamska? You entered with such vigor!"

From the reaction of Harriet and Hawthorne, it was easy enough to guess that this man was the patriarch of the family, Adamska Violet.

Adamska, looking troubled, informed us all of the situation, "Dorothy lost a valuable necklace, and… it's become a bit of a problem."

"Well, if the lady of the Goldie family is in trouble, we certainly can't turn our backs on her. After all—"

Hawthorne glanced at Juliet, but she harshly cut him off before he could finish. "No need to get into all that now. Come on, everyone, let's go."

Adamska, Eva, Juliet, Harriet, Cain, plus Hawthorne… We're already up to 6 other people. It'd be nice if we could get to 10, I fleetingly thought, as I followed the others toward Dorothy along with Juliet.

At first glance, the Kogetsukan's interior simply looked like a typical Western-style building, but as we made our way through the halls I quickly realized that even more money must have been spent on it than I had imagined earlier. The wood floors never creaked, no matter how much weight you put on them, the carpets were well-cleaned, and the walls were immaculate despite how old they appeared to be.

Adamska pointed ahead at a man and woman arguing in the main hall, turning his head to us to simply say "Here they are," as we continued on toward them.

Dorothy Goldie, who had the figure of Marie Antionette, could be heard yelling, "Why is my necklace missing!? It couldn't have just walked away on its own!"

The man taking the brunt of her words had the image of Yan Qing, and calmly responded, "We're doing everything we can to find it, madam. Please, just give us a little more time." His words were humble, but they didn't come off as completely subservient, giving off an air about him that wasn't too different from the Yan Qing I know.

"You can see for yourselves how it's turning into kind of a mess…" Adamska said, already wearing a weary look on his face. Perhaps that was indication that he had already been on the receiving end of her current temper.

"…That furious lady over there is Dorothy Goldie, and the man trying to placate her is Wǔ, from the Marble Company," Hawthorne quietly told me, but the mention of the new 'Marble Company' only pushed my brain further towards crumbling under the weight of everything I need to process.

"I'll wait for as long as I must for it to be found. That necklace is very precious to me…" Dorothy curtly replied, still seeming to fume with anger. As she did, a small girl trotted up to her.

"Mommy, I'm hungryyy." When I was able to get a look at the kid's face, I was surprised to see that the person whose form she borrows is actually Paul Bunyan. Though, her size is completely different to the girl I know. As a Servant, Bunyan is a monstrous 8 meters tall, but the little girl in front of me now was a size befitting a normal child.

"Be patient, Laurie. It'll be time for snacks soon, and Mommy's having a very important conversation right now."

"Okay! I'll go play with Cain then," Laurie replied, and took off in the same trot that she had come in with.

"What's going on here, Wǔ?" In Laurie's place, a new person had appeared. By all accounts, she looked just like Jaguar Warrior, but I could already tell she was the complete opposite in terms of personality to her Chaldean counterpart. While normally she's the loud and obnoxious type, this woman had a cold and unapproachable bearing to her.

"Oh, hey Sis. I'm afraid we've got a problem on our hands," Wǔ began, filling her in on what was happening.

"That dignified-looking woman there is Ann, the vice president of the Marble Company. Quite strong, and quite terrifying at that," Hawthorne once more explained to me. Thank goodness a kind soul like him is here to soothe my haywire mind.

"I see. So Ms. Dorothy's necklace went missing in the bathhouse…" Ann, now having a grasp on the situation, glanced at each of the people in the room. When our eyes met, I felt a chill run down my spine. This is the glare of a woman who could probably kill any of us if she felt like it, and the tension on everyone's face was proof enough of that.

"It took ten minutes for me to realize I'd forgotten my necklace in the changing room and go back to check on it. Someone must have taken it while I was out," Dorothy said, seeming to be the only one not afraid of her.

"Weren't you standing guard over the bathhouse then, Wǔ?"

"Yeah, I was. I can promise you that no men went in or out while I was keeping watch. In fact, nobody went in at all after Ms. Dorothy left—"

"Then the only person who could have taken it is you! Well? Let's have it!"

"Please calm down, Ms. Dorothy…" As Wǔ once more tried to de-escalate, another figure came into the room with large strides. As I looked, I saw none other than Mordred, the Knight of Treachery.

"Ugh, could you keep it down? I was having a great nap until you woke me," Mordred's lookalike brashly said in a voice that wasn't far off from a shout. What a grating way of speaking… It's not too far off from how Mordred is as a Servant, but even so, this is a step beyond.

"Oh Morris, remember that we are guests. Can't you be a little more polite?"

"Don't order me around like you're my real mom. I don't wanna hear it from you." Seemingly, they have a mother-child relationship, but judging by Morris's words, it seemed to be uniquely strained. "Whatever. At least if we were at a bar it'd be more fun to make a

fool of yourself like this," Morris continued, yawning loudly and crudely. I had no idea that a delinquent like this could actually exist.

While Morris let out that long yawn, and I watched judgingly, our eyes accidentally locked momentarily. "Huh? The hell are you lookin' at? You want a piece?" As soon as Morris's words reached my ears, we were already within a fist's reach of each other, as if this is something that happens all the time.

This situation devolved pretty quickly… Thankfully, Juliet stepped in front of me like a shield. "I'm sorry about that. He's still a little loopy."

"Hm? Oh, right, you brought him here…" Morris grumbled, eyeing Juliet up and down, as if judging her. "Eh, not bad. I guess you pass."

Juliet was savvy enough to know exactly what Morris meant by that. However, she wasn't the type of lady to simply stay silent when disgraced. "You're one to talk, seeing how you slept most of the trip here."

"What do you expect? I was busy living it up all night. And just what is this guy to you, anyway?" Morris questioned, pointing a finger right at me. I know the wrong answer could cause a fiasco, but I knew just as much as he did.

After hesitating for a moment, Juliet finally replied, "…He's a friend from school. I wanted someone outside our families to be here, so that I didn't end up suffocating."

"Hmn, a friend, eh?" Morris huffed, looking directly into my face. I simultaneously didn't want to make eye contact nor look away, because I knew both would likely get a fist in my mouth. Luckily, Morris's gaze slowly fell downwards onto my body, followed by my feet. "All right, I'll let it go this once. But there won't be a next time. Whatever happens, you'll have to live with it."

I couldn't help but picture Morris as a werewolf in my head, and I felt sick at how well it fit. The thought of sleeping under the same roof as someone like this didn't sit right with me.

"Morris! You… Why is it that you're always so rude around girls? This is why you're not more popular!" Dorothy scolded Morris. After all the yelling she did about the necklace, I couldn't believe she was saying something sensible.

"Shut the hell up! I'm done listening to you talk. If he didn't want me to come at him, he shouldn't have pissed me off!" Morris yells defensively, as if on best behavior.

"Why is it so hard for you to just be a good kid…" Seems like Morris and Dorothy's relationship has always been like this…

"Are you all right, Morris!?" Appearing in front of us now was Fionn mac Cumhaill, in all his handsome, blond glory. Assumedly, he was the patriarch of the Goldie family. As he walked out, I could tell from his flushed face that he had likely been drinking. Everywhere I look, I'm surrounded by good-looking men and women. Don't get me wrong, it's great, but I do feel a little inadequate.

"I'm fine, Pops."

"Good, good. For a moment, I was worried something had happened to you."

"…That's Aaron, the head of the Goldie family, and you've already met Morris, his son," Hawthorne softly informed me, with a forced smile showing through his eyes. He must already have some thoughts of his own on this father-son duo.

"You're such a worrywart, old man. I'll be taking over the Goldies soon enough. Just relax and enjoy that whisky you've been saving."

"Yes, well… I can't say I approve of the way you disappointed your bride, though."

Bride!? I reflexively turned to look at Juliet, to which she just shook her head with a look of melancholy.

"…I'm sorry, but I don't want to explain it again. You'll see soon enough." …If she doesn't want to talk about it, I'll trust her and leave it be. As I was thinking about this all, Hawthorne had moved to speak with Wǔ.

"Wǔ, may I have a word?"

"Yeah, what is it?

"I'm not saying this just to clear my own name, but… the three of us have airtight alibis. At the time of the theft, Rikka here was unconscious, and Juliet and I were watching over him until he regained it. We can all vouch for one another. Since there's no question of their guilt, why not let the two of them handle the investigation?"

Thanks to Cain and his ball, I guess now I have an alibi… I suppose luck is a fickle thing, isn't it? Though, I don't think this really evens out the fact that I have amnesia.

At Hawthorne's suggestion, Wǔ gave a look that almost said 'Hm, not a bad idea.' right on his face. "Well, I guess that'd be better than me looking into it, since Ms. Dorothy obviously doesn't trust me anymore."

"As long as I get my necklace back, I don't care who finds it."

Taking stock of the situation between these two, Ann stepped in to accept Hawthrone's proposal. "Now that that's clear, I'll leave it up to you two for now. But if it still doesn't turn up, then I'll take matters into my own hands. In our line of business, trust is everything, after all." Ann's words felt soft, but the weight behind them was immense. If we failed to get back this necklace, what would she resort to…?

"Are you sure you'll be okay, Juliet?"

"You're such a worrywart, Daddy. I told you, I'm fine. …Now what's the big idea, Doctor?" Juliet questioned, not angrily, but out of genuine perplexment.

"Well, I thought it might be a good way for Rikka to rehabilitate his memory, you see."

"You know… that's a good point," Juliet agreed, now understanding. Though, I do hope that this doesn't actually end up distracting me from regaining my memories.

"Now that you've met everybody from both families, how is your memory doing, Rikka?"

I had to be brutally honest, so I simply gave him a shrug to show that no progress had been made at all.

"Ah, not so well, I see. Oh, right, I've neglected to explain the Marble Company in all this, haven't I? They're some of the most famous people in the business world. It's even said that any contract they're present for will never, ever be broken."

"The Marble Company doesn't just own the Kogetsukan, they even own the island it's on. So you never have to worry about unwanted visitors out here. Unfortunately…" Juliet said with a faint twinge of sadness.

"Of course, that also means that if they were the ones to steal the necklace, we would have no hope of getting it back."

"I think we can trust them. Don't you? Trust is everything for them, after all. I'm sure that necklace wasn't cheap, but it couldn't possibly be worth ruining their reputation." They do make them sound pretty dang impressive… "They have clients all over the world, which gives them a lot of power. Neither of our families could hope to match them, even if we combined forces. Of course, we wouldn't have asked them to be here otherwise. While we're on the subject, Ann is the company's second in command, and despite his young age, Wǔ is one of the top five most powerful people in the company."

"With people that high up in the company here, just shows you how seriously they take all this."

"By the way, Doctor, despite giving herself a name that rhymes with 'One', Ann's actually the second seat. Why is that?"

"She may be Number 2 officially, but the elder above her has long since named her to be the successor. Therefore she takes the name of Ann, and essentially runs the organization." I hadn't thought that her name would be so straightforward in meaning…

"I see… but let's not get caught up in that now. Let's just go talk to them."

"Yes, I knew that everyone would be tired thanks to the early departure, so I opened the women's bath first," Ann answered Juliet's questions neatly, saying nothing unnecessary.

"I think we got here a little after noon, and yeah, we were all pretty tired. I'm glad that at least my mom and sister were able to freshen up." From what Juliet says, it looks like instead of freshening up she had to spend her time taking care of me. I couldn't help but feel bad about that. "What about you, Wǔ? Did you ever take your eyes off the bath's entrance?"

"Psh, what do you think? Yeah, I was sitting right there the whole time, but I was busy peeling vegetables since we're short on staff right now. But even if I couldn't keep an eye on it the whole time, I would've noticed if any lechers had tried to get in. From what I remember, Ms. Harriet and Ms. Eva went in first, then Ms. Dorothy and Ms. Laurie went in just as they were leaving. I'm pretty sure nobody else went in after Ms. Dorothy and her daughter came out. Though I sure didn't expect to see Ms. Dorothy back again so soon. Especially not looking like she was ready to carve me up." Hearing it laid out, this case seems simpler than expected. But that's exactly the problem, it's too simple.

"So if my mom and sister couldn't have taken it… then who possibly could? There's no other viable suspects."

"True. A woman may have been able to make it past Wǔ without drawing suspicion, but there don't seem to be any women who could have done it…"

Ah, wait… what if…?

"Oh? Did something occur to you, Rikka?"

Thinking about whether it was in our best interest to voice it here, and remembering Juliet's glance earlier that told me to stay silent, I managed to hold myself back from speaking my thoughts.

"So we're just supposed to believe you've got an alibi, huh?" Morris said, out of the blue. Maybe it's because he had gotten bored from all the talking, but he seemed ready to get in our way. "I mean, hypothetically speaking, couldn't twins swap places to pull this kinda thing off? Or some other kinda trick? Just sayin'."

"…No way. No one would get them mixed up like that. I know I wouldn't. And no other trick would work on me…" Wǔ calmly interjected. Quickly after, however, he corrected himself. "Well, unless it was a girl who usually dresses like a guy, then they might have been able to slip past me with the right clothes. But there's nobody like that here."

"Hah! Cross-dressers here in the mansion? Gimme a break," Morris loudly laughed. Though, isn't there someone just like that in front of me? The Mordred I know, who Morris is the double of, is a woman in actuality… "…Huh? Why're you looking at me like that? You think I stole it?"

There's no use asking something like this, I'll never get an answer. The fastest way to find out is to use force. As soon as that thought went through my mind, I jumped at Morris.

"Hey! No fighting!"

My goal here wasn't to win this fight, because I knew I couldn't. The only thing I needed to do was confirm if Morris was a woman. To this end, I took advantage of the confusion and reached towards Morris's chest and groin. But… there's something there that shouldn't be, and some things missing that should be there…!

"Where the hell do you think you're touching!? Get off!" Pushed off with ridiculous muscle strength, that was the last piece of evidence that he was, in fact, a man. "You calling me a woman, punk? Fine! I don't care if you're my bride's guest anymore! You and me, outside! Now!"

Giving up on my idea, I had hoped that Wǔ would step in and help me out, but he didn't move. He knew just as well as I now did that I was in the one in the wrong here. Luckily, help unexpectedly still came from elsewhere.

"I'm afraid I can't let you do that, Mr. Morris," said a young man, now appearing before us. Not only did he have the same appearance as Bedivere, but he carried himself in a remarkably similar manner to him as well.

"Oh, hey Chris. Thanks for— Wait, now of all times you show up!?" Before I knew it, Morris's hate was directed squarely at the intervening Chris rather than me.

"You wanna stop me Chris? Fine, I'll just beat your ass first, then. Bring it!"

"Then it seems you leave me no choice. My apologies!"

The fight that broke out from there was quite the sight to behold. Morris came at Chris, wildly swinging with all his strength, but Chris was able to fend him off with what seemed to be skills given to him via immaculate training. As the brawl wound to a close, Chris had managed to come out unscathed, with Morris on the back foot.

"Goddammit, fight fair!"

"You'll have to forgive me, sir."

After only about five minutes, Morris was almost out of breath, and his right hand was swollen a bright red. "Shit… Gah, fine, I'm not in the mood for punchin' anymore." Morris clutched his bruised hand, keeping distant from Chris. He seemed like he was done, but he was still staring straight at me. I couldn't help but make eye contact with him again.

"Hmm. Well, good job on getting him to settle down, but that you injured him in the process shows you still have a long ways to go." Chris shrank a bit at hearing Wǔ's critique, which gave me the idea that Chris may be his disciple of sorts.

"What was that all about, anyway? Why were you fighting?"

To answer Chris's question, Juliet quickly explained what had happened so far to him.

"Then the necklace may still be around somewhere, yes? In that case, I have an idea of where it might be hidden." Immediately after saying that, Chris had taken off running towards the bathhouse. Morris couldn't help but watch with a dumbfounded look on his face.

"The necklace isn't just gonna turn up that easy—" and just as he was about to finish his thought, Chris was running back to us, holding what seemed to be a small chain tightly in his hand.

"I found it. It was in the back of the drawer."

"Just like that!?" Morris cried out, his astonishment echoing throughout the entire hall.

News of the discovery of the necklace spread quickly, and before long everyone had gathered to confirm it.

"Oh, yes! That's certainly my necklace!" After getting it back, Dorothy happily held her necklace close. Hopefully she's satisfied for now. "But that's strange, I don't remember putting it there…"

"Aw maaan!" Laurie, seeing the necklace, let out a shout. "…I thought I hid it really well, but you found it in no time. This sucks!" she continued, heatedly scampering out of the room. There was no necklace thief. In the end, it was a simple prank by a little girl. 'The mountain labored, and what it brought forth was a mouse…'

"Huh? You mean she took it!? Why the hell'd I have to get punched for that!? What was all that even for!?" Morris barked, waving his red, swollen fist. However, Aaron swiftly stopped his son from protesting further.

"That's enough, Morris. Shut it."

Dorothy bowed her head to everyone in apology. “I’m so sorry. I never thought my daughter would get up to such mischief…”

“Pay it no mind. Children will be children, after all,” the motherly Eva said, and no one could argue with her. She was so persuasive, in fact, that everyone seemed to silently agree to let her get away with it as a harmless act of childhood nonsense.

“Ah, while we’re here, would you like me to take a look at your hand, Morris? Having your dominant hand injured must be a nuisance,” Hawthorne asked, with good intentions in his heart. Though, to a thug like him, it could be seen as the opposite.

“Tch, this is nothing. It’ll be fixed up with a little spit-shine. Anyway, it’s evening now, right? Let’s eat already.”

Wǔ, agreeing, followed Morris’s comment. “Good point. It’s a little early, but I’ll go start getting dinner ready.”

Wǔ’s dinner was delicious beyond expectation, and everyone from both families gave their compliments.

“It’s just a couple techniques I picked up back when I was at the bottom of the chain and had to be on kitchen duty,” Wǔ modestly deflects, but I’m sure those times taught him a lot more skills than just that. He’s a man of many mysteries, but certainly not in a bad way.

“Thanks for the grub!”

“Grub!”

Cain and Laurie were the first to put down their forks and knives, ready to go back outside and play if it weren’t for the wary looks from the adults. A concrete ‘It’s too late out now, so you can play your games tomorrow’ from Dorothy finally made the two of them scurry off to their rooms. Seeing Cain bounce around alongside her was a funny sight, I have to admit.

“…Thank you for a great meal,” Juliet quietly thanked our humble chef for the meal, and got up to leave alongside her brother, giving me a feeling that she was disheartened.

“Just take it away. Trying to cut my steak hurts my hand,” Morris bemoaned, leaving most of his food on his plate. A waste of the finest meat, cooked to perfection.

“I do apologize for that. If you don’t mind, shall I cut your steak for you?” Chris may have had pure intentions, but all it seemed to do was make Morris even angrier, causing him to throw his knife and fork to the side.

“Get lost! Dammit, how’d this end up happening, anyway…”

“Come now. Adversity only strengthens us, after all. As long as that little episode brought our families closer together, it was well worth it.” Maybe to be the head of such an important family you need to be a bit insensitive, but still… “And now, once the engagement between my son and the Violets’ daughter is finalized, the alliance between our families will be sealed!”

I’d suspected something like this was up… Now I see why Juliet didn’t want to talk about it.

"…Don't make such a big deal out of it. That's what this whole trip was for to begin with…" Juliet said to me, responding to my thoughts that were accidentally showing on my face.

"With our Marble Company present, this engagement contract will be irrevocable. If anyone should object to it, even from the families, we will ensure they keep any such objections to themselves." Ann's words had an indescribable amount of pressure behind them. I have no reason to doubt the lengths she'd go to keep her word.

"I have painful and not-so-painful ways of doing that. The painful ones are my specialty," Wǔ added in a way that was simultaneously both a joke and deadly serious.

Suddenly, a ringing sound echoed throughout the dining room.

"Huh? That's strange. All of our guests should already be here…" Chris's words made me realize that the sound was actually the doorbell ringing.

"Save the questions for later and keep your wits about you. Sis is already ready for a fight." Ann and Wǔ exuded a combative aura that even someone off the street could feel. Chris was certainly strong, as evidenced before, but compared to them he was like a baby.

"…Someone's coming," Ann whispered, and precisely three seconds later, an uninvited guest had appeared in front of the dining room.

"Please, pardon my intrusion. I rang the doorbell first, of course, but seeing as no one came, I saw myself in. I hope you'll forgive me." Surprising us all, a new character had entered the fray. Like everyone else, our visitor appeared in the form of a Servant I'm familiar with. He appeared as Sherlock Holmes, of all people.

"Who are you? People don't just stumble across this place."

"I believe Mr. Goldie, or perhaps your superior, can answer that," the newcomer tells Wǔ. As he does, Ann and Aaron's expressions change.

"I didn't think you'd actually come. I could've sworn nobody was following us…"

"Difficult to believe as it is, it seems you have come," Aaron said, extending a hand toward the Holmes-like man. "Welcome, Sir Detective. Truly."

"Now that I'm here, allow me to introduce myself to everyone properly. My name is Sheringham, a detective of some renown." The self-proclaimed detective shook Aaron's hand with a smile, now having revealed his identity to the room. Sheringham… another name that doesn't ring any bells for me.

"But Pops, why'd you go and bring a detective here?" Morris, not hiding his disdain for our new guest whatsoever, questioned his father. But like the Marble Company, it seems like the detective's presence won't be something he can do anything about.

"A fair question. I suppose you all have a right to know." Thinking on his next words, Aaron's face turned to an expression of anxiety for a moment before finally continuing. "The truth is, we received a threatening letter while I was putting this marriage proposal together. It said simply 'Call off Morris and Juliet's engagement, or the Goldie family will suffer the consequences.'"

"But Pops, don't you get bullshit threats like that all the time? What's got you so spooked about this one?"

"We kept this proposal strictly between our families. Not even my most trusted executives know about it. Do you understand what that means?" At hearing Aaron's explanation, Morris's demeanor changed. Looks like even someone as seemingly dumb as him can get what this must mean.

"So you're sayin' whoever wrote that letter… is here?"

"I was just wondering what to do about it yesterday when Mr. Sheringham contacted me."

Sheringham confirmed his story, "I simply told him via mail that I might be able to assist with any issues he may have arising from his son's engagement."

"I discussed it with Ann and we agreed that if he could track us down here, we would hire him."

"Wait, so how do you know about the threat?"

Sheringham gives a wry smile at Morris's question. "That's a trade secret, I'm afraid. All I can say is that nothing escapes my notice or understanding."

"You expect us to believe that!? How do we know you didn't set this whole thing up yourself!?"

"Even if he did, his skills as a detective are nothing to sniff at. He could never have found us here were it otherwise."

Ann, agreeing, continued Aaron's statement, "Only a handful in the company know where the Kogetsukan is located, and the architect who designed it has since passed away. There's no way he could've found this place unless he tracked our itinerary perfectly."

"It was a nice way of me saying hello, though, wasn't it?" Sheringham replies, without missing a beat, and slowly moves his gaze across each person's face, as if mentally analyzing us in each instant.

"With the exception of myself, the people in this mansion mainly fall into one of the following categories: The Goldie family, the Violet family, and the Marble Company. Of course, there are a pair who are not directly involved as well, being Dr. Hawthorne and… Rikka." As he got to my name in the lineup, he looked toward me and gave me a wink, as if he had everything figured out. Just… how much does he really know? "You all have my word that I will uncover whatever may be happening here. I did say I have some renown to me, after all," Sheringham proclaimed in a laugh, just like another detective of 'some renown'.

When I woke up after going to sleep, I was back in my room at Chaldea.

"Senpai! Thank goodness, you're awake! Are you all right!?"

"…Mash? You are still Mash, right?" I ask without thinking. Of course, if I'm in Chaldea, with my cute kouhai right in front of me, there's no one else it could be. But on the off-chance that she's also not who she looks like, I think I'd lose it.

"Uh, y-yes. I'm still Mash Kyrielight… Why do you ask?" Hearing her reply like that finally puts me at ease. "Have you met someone else with my name? Or some other me with a different name…?" Maybe it's because I'm still groggy, but I don't exactly know how to explain it to her.

"…So did I collapse, then?"

"You were just in another of your REM trances. …Do you not remember what happened…?"

"…Not at all." Mash looked a bit sad at my response.

"You were having coffee in the break room, and I was having cocoa. We were having a lovely conversation when you began to stare at the moon outside the window. Then out of nowhere, you just kind of mumbled 'Juliet…' and passed out. You even spilled your piping hot coffee all over yourself as well…" Hearing it now, I can remember the part where I got coffee, but the rest is still fuzzy. But I think I can remember looking at the moon, too…

"Indeed. What followed was akin to a small fireworks display, considering how panicked young Mash was," interjected none other than James Moriarty himself. Even though I had just been with a man who shared his face in my dream, I knew without a doubt this was actually him. The true Moriarty was friendly, but at the same time unfathomably fearsome. Beyond that, I saw that Sherlock Holmes was there with them as well, likely helping Mash watch over me.

"Luckily it would seem the heavens have not forsaken you, though they may have been momentarily inattentive. Fatefully, I happened to be passing by at the time. So, strain though it was on my aging back, I carried you all the way to your room. I further went above and beyond the call of duty by examining your burns."

"One must always strive for accuracy when relaying information, Professor. As you'll recall, we both happened to be passing by. Furthermore, it was I who examined Mr. Fujimaru," Holmes countered the recollection. However, after their small squabble, they both bowed their heads in apology, realizing that no matter what had actually happened, it was inappropriate for the time.

"…Sorry to put you all out like that."

"Not at all. I simply could not turn my back on your plight. Not, at least, with young Mash's arms wrapped so tightly around it. She would have made an excellent sumo wrestler in another life! Were I only twenty years younger, I might have fallen for her!"

Mash twisted around a bit, embarrassed at the professor's compliment.

"By the way, Mash… it's May 2017 right now, right?" I asked, remembering that I wanted to make sure.

Mash, confused, affirmed me, "Y-yes, that's right. It's May 7th, why do you ask?"

Holmes raised an eyebrow at me. "…Hm. Confirming the date without paying any heed to the mild burns you suffered from the coffee, eh?" Holmes then smiled, as if he had just guessed something. I know he can't see inside my head or anything, but the great

detective was strikingly good at guesswork. “You must have had a most peculiar dream indeed. Would you care to share with us what it was about?”

It was… quite the long dream, so it was hard to explain it all quickly. Nonetheless, I still tried.

Mash, attempting to make sense of it all, spoke up. “That’s… That’s… That’s like something straight out of the beginning of a mystery novel, Senpai!” she excitedly yelled out, letting her love of them shine through. “Let’s see… So there’s Juliet and Harriet, who I can tell are both beautiful from your descriptions… the caring motherly Eva… their hellion brother, Mephi— I mean, Cain… and Mr. Adamska, their father, who for some reason sounds completely worthless as a person. Ooh, and after that—”

Seeing Mash like this, Moriarty couldn’t help but smile from his amusement. “Hahaha! Calm yourself, young Mash. I’m afraid my boy here is still trying to wrap his head around all this as well. So we have five— no, six members of the Violet family alone, eh. I’m particularly interested in this Dr. Hawthorne fellow, myself!”

“Indeed. No doubt he’s some sort of detestable back-alley doctor, if not an outright fraud,” Holmes quipped coldly. The great detective has, of course, always been quite harsh towards Moriarty.

“A fraud? Surely you mean that detective who showed up at the very end? Some nerve he has, showing up to the mansion unannounced and flaunting his name as though he were the main character! What is it about men who call themselves detectives that makes them seem so terribly shady!?” Moriarty shoots back a biting quip of his own.

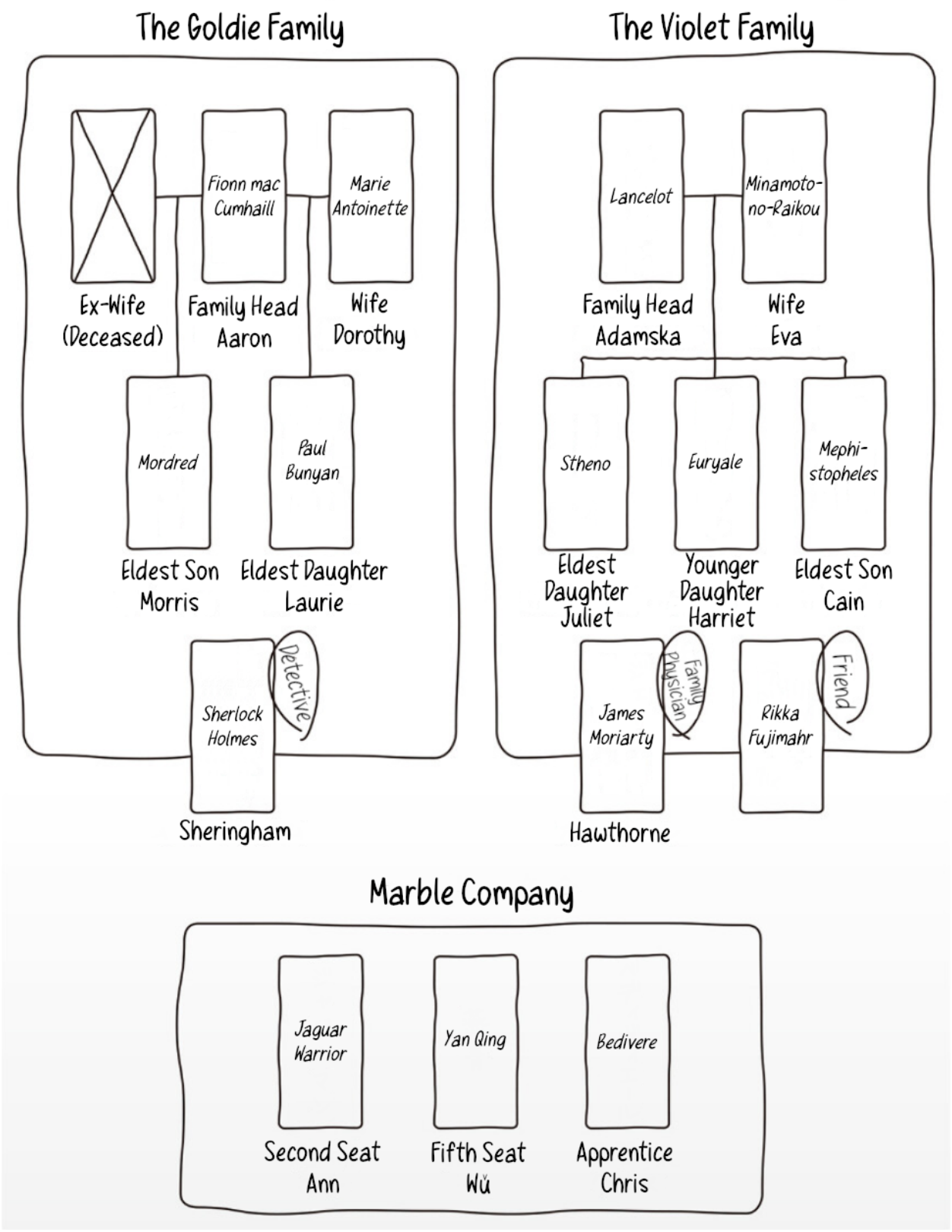
“Professor, with all due respect, there’s a method to Holmes’s madness. His goal is to get the culprit to lower their guard. Great detectives have to be shady. The nice ones always get killed off in the middle of the story!”

Holmes raised an eyebrow at the way Mash worded it, but didn’t say anything about it.

Moriarty, on the other hand, couldn’t help laughing. “Hahaha, you make an excellent point! What I wouldn’t give to have such an adoring fan myself! Aren’t you flattered, dear Holmes?”

“I appreciate the gesture, Ms. Kyrielight. But do be quiet for a moment. You have given me a great deal to think about.”

Mash’s cheeks went flush in response, though she quickly seemed to forget about it as she pointed to the whiteboard as if just remembering it’s there. “Oh, here, Senpai! Let me make a chart of the relationships between all the characters you just told us about really quick!” Before I knew it, a chart of the people involved with this case had been drawn up as she said.


The Goldie Family
Fionn mac Cumhaill
Marie Antoinette
Ex-Wife (Deceased)
Family Head Aaron
Wife Dorothy
Mordred
Paul Bunyan
Eldest Son Morris
Eldest Daughter Laurie
Sherlock Holmes
Detective
Sheringham
The Violet Family
Lancelot
Minamoto-no-Raikou
Family Head Adamska
Wife Eva
Stheno
Euryale
Mephi-stopheles
Eldest Daughter Juliet
Younger Daughter Harriet
Eldest Son Cain
James Moriarty
Family Physician
Rikka Fujimahr
Friend
Hawthorne
Marble Company
Jaguar Warrior
Yan Qing
Bedivere
Second Seat Ann
Fifth Seat Wǔ
Apprentice Chris

"Does this all look right to you?

"Yeah, that looks… about how I remember it." Of course, as an outsider to their families, I might have missed some connections.

Holmes took a long look at the chart for a while, but after a bit he turned to me. "…Ahem. Returning to the matter at hand, Mr. Fujimaru. In your dream you were named Rikka, and you were being cared for by an unfamiliar girl named Juliet, correct? Furthermore, you were staying at an unfamiliar Western-style mansion rather than Chaldea, along with two families. These families were made up of familiar Servants, but all of their names and some of their genders were different. Is that correct?"

"Yes. It was really confusing."

"That is far too intricate to be an ordinary dream. For one thing, did you even know the word 'kogetsu' beforehand?"

"…No, not at all…"

"According to the dictionary, it's an old Japanese word for 'crescent moon.' A lot of Western-style country houses are given similarly old-fashioned names. In fact, I think they should have names like that. The Kogetsukan sounds like a wonderful name to me!"

"Good grief. It seems I underestimated the depths of your affection for mysteries, Ms. Kyrielight. How about you, Professor? Any comment on these revelations?"

Moriarty folded his arms in thought, and spoke after a bit, "Hmm. You mean the phenomenon of learning a word through a dream that one would have no way of knowing otherwise? In the magecraft world, there are no shortage of methods to accomplish that. Precognitive dreams, clairvoyance, the remote sharing of minds…"

"Indeed. This latest case may be the result of one such method. Given what we currently know, my hypothesis is that you may be picking up on a signal of sorts… One originating from the one who is witnessing these events in reality."

"Yes… I imagine it is something along those lines. How unfortunate for you, young man. We don't know where it's being broadcast from, but you seem to have unwittingly tuned in to Rikka's channel, so to speak. However, humans contain quite a lot of data. How they sound, how their skin feels, their expressions… A wealth of information. This was likely too much information for you to process about so many people, so your mind substituted familiar Servants for these new faces. Think of it as a kind of safety function. Were you unable to do so, your mind may well have broken under the strain of so much data," Moriarty's words flowed on and on like water. I almost felt like my head was going to burst, but I think I managed to take it all in.

"By the way, Senpai, did you feel like you could move around freely in your dream?"

"I feel like I could… but at the same time, I feel like I was also moving in the way Rikka Fujimahr would want me to. I don't really know how to describe it… but I kind of feel like they're influencing me because above all they don't want to make Juliet sad."

It's as if Rikka is saying to me, 'I can't do this, but you can,' and entrusting themself with me.

"It seems the mind lurking in your subconscious assessed the situation far more quickly and accurately than your conscious one. That is to say… this was not your last dream. This story will continue on!" As those words came out of the professor's mouth, I was struck by an unfathomable drowsiness, and knew immediately that this wasn't something I could fight. Without even being able to tell them an important detail…

"Oh, Rik—…"

As the words started to leave my mouth, my legs gave out and I fell to my knees. I barely managed not to fall over completely, but it was getting harder and harder to even hold my head up.

"Senpai…? Senpai!?"

As my neck gave way, my vision went black. I could barely still hear Mash and the others' voices.

"You see? Young Mash was right. You have only just completed the prologue. From now on, you will delve into the mystery proper. It may be but a dream to you, but within the dream, I assure you, the mystery itself will be quite real. Now, permit me to give you a word of advice, directly from the Napoléon of Crime, James Moriarty himself. There is a certain malevolence present in the situation and relationships you described…" I couldn't see his face, but I knew he had to have a devilish smile on his face right now. "…and you will find yourself on the wrong end of it. Of that, I am certain."

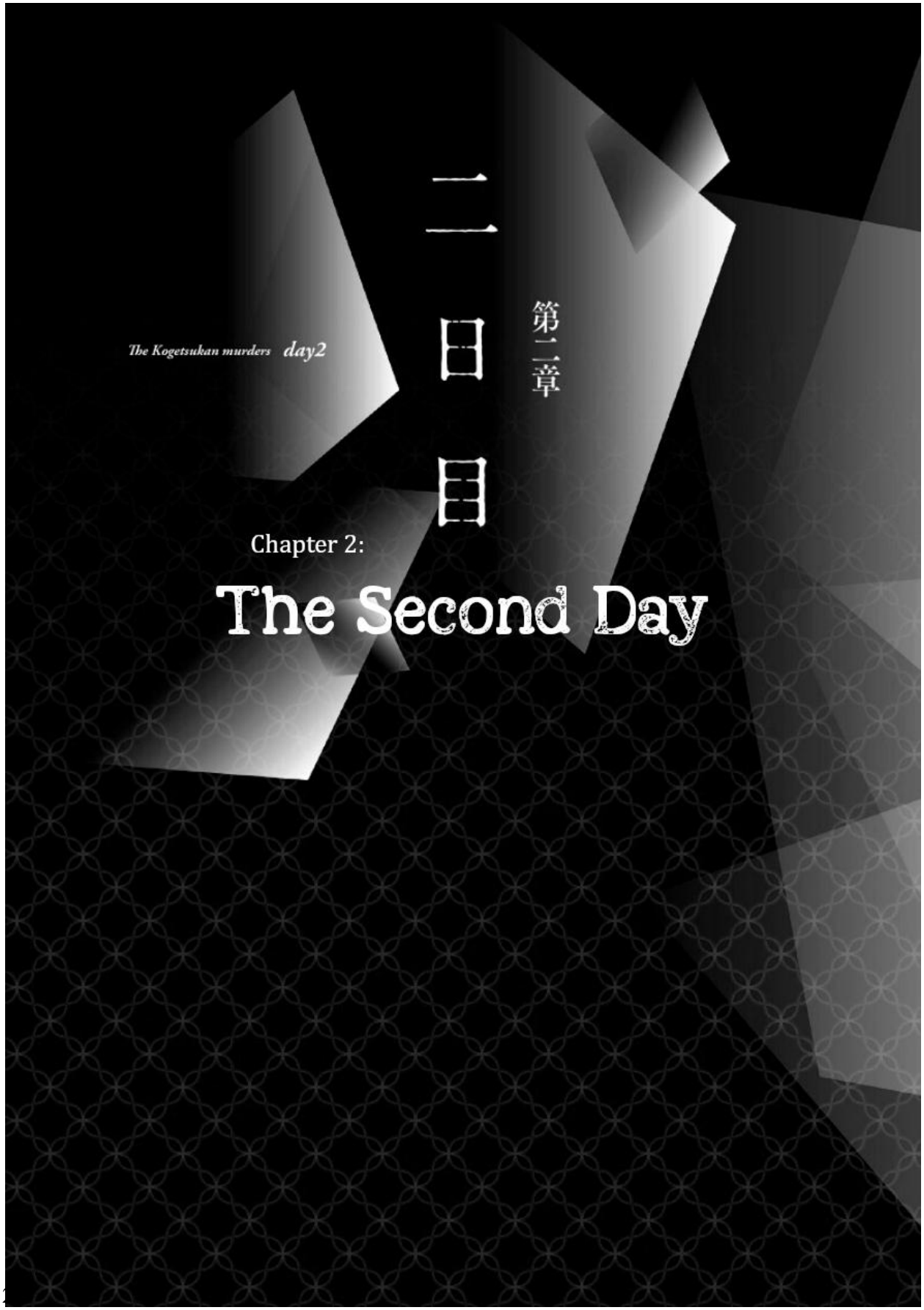
"Professor? What do you mean by—" Mash, not knowing what was going on, was in a panic now. Mash truly is a good kouhai, worrying about me like this.

"I'm afraid there is no time to explain. The sandman is already at work on young Ritsuka even as we speak. I suppose the best I can do now is be your doctor within the dream and treat you as best I am able." I know he's being sarcastic, but it's still strangely reassuring to hear nonetheless.

"This loss of consciousness is not being brought on by a need for sleep… It seems there is nothing we can do to keep him awake." Holmes's voice reaches my ears. I know I'm going to lose consciousness, but I need to be able to hear what he has to say. "Mr. Fujimaru, allow me a word of advice as well, while there is still time to offer it. Consider, why did your brain choose to substitute Mordred for Morris? Simple. It did so in error. It merely assigned Mordred to him based on his violent disposition. It is a stark difference between what you know and the events you are witnessing. As such, there may be other errors of a similar nature. Listen closely. You cannot take what you see at face value. That is absolutely crucial."

Holmes's words reach me, but my mind is fading so fast that I can't possibly process them. "Think carefully, and act cautiously. Once you are back in this dream, we will be powerless to help you. This dream is someone else's reality. As long as you are experiencing it, you are that person. I don't want to scare you, but if you die in this dream we cannot say what may happen to you here." Right. Dying. Will I really be able to come out of this alive? "First, try to gather all the facts you can. Once you've done so, you can begin your deductions—…"

After this, I stopped hearing Holmes's voice, and my mind—…


The Kogetsukan murders day2
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Chapter 2:
The Second Day

Chapter 2: The Second Day

When I came to, I was in bed inside a room of the Kogetsukan. The last thing I remember happening last night was being exhausted from Sheringham's sudden entrance, and going back to my room early to sleep. Fortunately, I also remember my chat in Chaldea with Holmes and the others as well. As long as I can gather the facts as he said, I might be able to make everything go in the right direction.

After getting out of bed, I took a shower in my room's bathroom. Even though our faces were similar, I was still a stranger borrowing another person's body. I felt a bit guilty from looking, so I quickly rewrapped the bandage on our neck and put on some clothes.

After struggling to finish getting dressed, I went to the dining room and found that almost everyone else had already started eating breakfast.

"Ahh, those sandwiches were delicious."

"Yup. Not a bad breakfast, I have to admit."

Juliet and Harriet were talking cheerily over their plates. It was a pretty normal sandwich, but it was still delicious like they said. I had to wonder if it was because of the ingredients, or because of our chef's skill.

"I worked pretty hard on those, so I'm glad you all liked them." Wǔ gave the two a heartfelt smile.

"Yeah, they weren't bad. Best thing about sammiches is you don't need any fancy utensils to eat 'em." Ah, perhaps we're having sandwiches for breakfast out of consideration for Morris's injured hand.

"This tea is delicious too. Did you do something special with the tea leaves?"

"That would be my doing, Ms. Eva. Ms. Ann saw to it that I was extensively educated on brewing tea."

Ann opened her mouth, irritated, "Clients don't need to know your life story, Chris." Is she embarrassed about being a tea expert despite living such a violent lifestyle? I still don't quite understand Ann yet.

"You're going to make some lucky woman very happy one day, Chris. You're already so clean and proper!"

"…That's enough, Eva," Adamska mutters, discouraging her from commenting on his character.

"Is it my imagination, or did she just take a dig at me…?" Morris's previous good mood was wiped from his face, replaced with an increasingly angry expression. If he's not stopped, this could turn into another incident.

"You still have a lot of growing up to do if you're letting a lady's remarks get under your skin. Nothing anyone could say fazed me when I was your age." Before the situation got any worse, his father, Aaron, stepped in. "By then, I had my hands so full of beautiful, famous women that I hardly knew what to do with them all! Ha ha ha ha!"

Morris clicked his tongue. “You’re the one who told me I had to get married just as I was about to begin my own series of conquests…”

“Did I?” Despite him being so rude to his son, it was strangely hard to hate him for it. In any organization, being able to be loved by people is an invaluable talent. I doubt I’d like to have him as part of my family, though.

“I’m so sorry if anything I said offended you, Morris.”

“All good. Don’t worry about it.”

“By the way, Chris, why don’t you stop by my room later?”

“Stop that, Eva!” Adamska yells, hardly before her words had even finished being said.

“Feh, I can’t believe that guy lets his wife and kids run their mouths like that. Right, Pops?” Morris said, unable to keep his insults for the Violet family back any longer. It seems Aaron has given up on trying to stop him, as well.

“…Stop that, Morris. Can you not see how difficult you are making matters for your father?” Dorothy instead chided Morris this time. She may not be his birth mother, but she’s still a mother nevertheless.

“Yeah, yeah, all right.” The situation seems to have settled down, but the atmosphere is still tense as ever with the relationship between the two families being this bad.

“That was yummy…” Laurie whispered, sitting back after finishing her food and savoring it. Seeing her in all this was like seeing an angel.

“What a healthy appetite you have, Laurie. I’m proud of you.”

“Hey, can I have that too?” Laurie pointed at a sandwich that had been served to an empty seat, wasting away with no one to eat it.

“Now that you mention it, there is another plate left over! I want some too! Gimmeee!” Cain, noticing it too, pointed alongside her. Their manners aren’t great, but they’re basically both children.

“Okay, let’s share it then. Half each?”

“…That’s supposed to be for Sheringham, kids.” Now that Wǔ mentions it, I just realized Sheringham hasn’t shown up for breakfast yet. “Hey, Chris. Where is Sheringham, anyway?”

“Mr. Sheringham is still resting in his room. I thought his trip must have exhausted him, so I refrained from knocking, so as not to wake him. Was I wrong to do so?”

“No, that’s perfect etiquette for our guests. Just a bit strange for him to not be here, is all.”

Aaron, looking worried, speaks up, “Well that won’t do. We were supposed to discuss our plans this morning.”

Chris smiles and gives a bow. “In that case, allow me. I’ll go and fetch Mr. Sheringham right now.” He then turns and walks away quickly. Despite only being an apprentice, his physique seems extremely toned, showing in how fast he is.

“Ask him if he still wants breakfast or not too!”

"Yeah, ask him!"

As Laurie and Cain happily yell towards Chris, Morris rubs his temples while watching. "God, hear those brats screeching? It's givin' me a damn headache. This is a hotel, not a kindergarten."

Harriet and Eva couldn't help themselves but snicker at Morris's comment.

"Hear that? As if he isn't the biggest baby here."

"True… But don't you find his boorishness somehow endearing in its own way?"

Morris gets out of his seat, furious at being singled out. "I can hear you, you know!" He looked as if he could stomp towards them at the drop of a pin, but then—

"Aaaaaahhh!"

The scream of a man cries out from somewhere. Is it from deeper into the halls? No, wait…

"Wasn't that… Chris's voice!?"

I gave a grim nod to Juliet beside me. This was the first time I'd ever heard him scream, but from the sound of the voice and the situation, he was the only one it could possibly be. Juliet and I then got up from our seats together to rush to the scene.

"We'll go ahead and take a look. You guys stay here."

"But…" Adamska went to stop Juliet, but Wǔ cut him off before he could finish.

"This can't be good news. I'll go ahead with Lady Juliet and Rikka, the rest of you stay calm and stay put." As Wǔ said this, he looked at me and gave a wink only I could notice. He seems to be trying to look out for me. If he keeps this up, he'll be going higher and higher on my list of favorites.

Before any objections could be raised, Juliet, Wǔ and I left the dining room.

Chris was easy to spot standing in the hall. "You're all here?" He spoke to us while frozen outside Sheringham's room, which was supposed to be his destination. Fortunately, he didn't seem injured.

"What happened, Chris? I don't think I've ever heard you raise your voice before."

"I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking straight. I'm all right now. But…" Chris cautiously glanced at the door to the room, unlocked and still half-open.

"…What happened inside his room?"

"Ms. Juliet, don't," he started, but Chris was unable to stop her in time.

Juliet lightly pushed the half-open door, revealing Sheringham's slumped-over body on the floor to everyone. I can't believe this… the detective got killed off first!? "No way… Is he really dead?" Juliet muttered in shock, not expecting to find this grim scene on the other side of the doorway.

"Looks like he's been dead for some time now… I'll seal the area off and go tell the others."

We all returned to the dining room, gathering the rest of the guests with us. Wǔ then plainly told everyone what had transpired.

"I can't believe Sheringham is dead…" Dorothy seemed heartbroken over the death of the man she had just met last night.

Both Aaron and Ann were silent, but I could guess how they felt. Sheringham may have been suspicious, but his skills as a detective were the real deal, and him being here would have easily been a deterrent to anyone planning anything underhanded. However, now that deterrent is gone…

"Is this… the work of a murderer? No, an accident?" Adamska asks Wǔ with an uneasy look on his face. The suggestion that there's someone who could so easily kill Sheringham in our midst…. it's a heavy thought. I can understand why Adamska would hope this is a mistake.

"We haven't had the chance to examine his body too closely yet, but it sure didn't look like he died of natural causes."

"There might not be any point in asking, but do we know who saw him last?"

None but Chris reacted to Harriet's question, raising his hand.

"Ah, you did?"

"I wasn't technically the last to see him, but… Mr. Sheringham did ask me to bring him some tea last night."

"And? There's gotta be more to it than that, right?" Ann folded her arms, putting pressure on Chris.

Chris was clearly hesitant to continue. "Well…"

"Don't be coy. This is an emergency. Just spit it out."

Under the pressure of his boss, Chris probably felt like he had no choice but to tell the full story. "Mr. Sheringham had requested two teacups. …It looked like there was someone else with him."

"Damn, man…" Morris muttered, with a shocked look on his face.

"Do you know who it was?" Ann urged him to keep going, but Chris shook his head in response.

"I… I couldn't tell. Mr. Sheringham was waiting for me outside his room, and he slipped back inside after I gave him the tea tray. I didn't get so much as a look at whoever was in there. Based on the way he acted, I thought he might be entertaining a woman… but I didn't give it much thought beyond that."

"My, oh my… I didn't think you were still so innocent, Chris," Eva commented, giggling.

Chris turned his head in embarrassment for a second, but quickly regained his composure and continued. "The only possible clue I can think of is that he had requested a left-handed teacup. Mr. Sheringham appeared to be right-handed himself, so I assume it must have been for his guest."

"Hah, that's just perfect!" Morris shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "Detective guy had more game than I thought. I don't suppose you were the left-handed woman, eh, stepmom?"

At the suggestion of herself, Dorothy's face went red with anger. "How could you even ask me that, Morris!? That is hardly a fit subject for a joke, especially now! Besides, I'm right-handed. How could you not know that? I've been your stepmother for ten years!"

"Yeah, yeah, I get it. It was a joke. Sheesh."

Wŭ looks around the group and simply asks, "I'm sorry to ask this now, but is anyone here left-handed?" However, unlike Harriet before, no one responded to Wŭ's question. He simply shook his head with a helpless expression. "…I'll take that as a no. Well, I guess it would be hard to get anyone to admit to that under the circumstances."

"Never mind who he might have been meeting with. This isn't going to affect our alliance, is it…?" Adamska was clearly unnerved, more so due to the idea of his pact being called off more than Sheringham's death, apparently. Or perhaps he's been in a situation like this before…

"No. Unfortunate accidents aside, we will proceed with the engagement as scheduled once we regroup." Ann's response left Adamska with an apprehensive, but accepting look on his face.

Dorothy, on the other hand, refused this answer. "You're kidding, right? We need to stop this deal and leave right now! Have someone come pick us up at once!"

"Unfortunately, we don't have any means of contacting anyone on the mainland. No matter what happens, not going ahead with the engagement is not an option," Ann said back, speaking in a cold, clerical voice.

"You mean, we're trapped here…? But, what if something happens to my Laurie?"

"No one will be coming to get us until two days from now. Until then, we will just have to make the best of things."

I could see that this situation was only making Dorothy more and more emotional when thinking about her daughter's safety.

Aaron took his arm around his wife and embraced her, saying, "It will be alright. We can't have a little thing like this get in the way of our arrangement. Not just for us, but for the Violets' sake as well."

"I couldn't agree more. Ah, what a relief…"

Morris snickered at seeing Adamska's bowed head. "Man, you sure are desperate, huh? This alliance really mean that much to you?"

"…Morris, that was going too far. Apologize. Now." Aaron spoke quietly, but with an intense fury.

Understanding the magnitude of his father's anger, Morris immediately bowed his head to Adamska. "Yeah… yeah. Sorry 'bout that, Mr. Adamska." After making his token apology, Morris glared at the group. "Anyway, we know the killer's here among us, right? Well, I'm not gonna let a little murder scare me!"

Seeing Morris's bold declaration, Ann whispered to Wǔ, "Looks like our decision to keep our personnel to a minimum backfired. I never thought we would have a murder on our hands." I don't really blame her for not expecting this, though. I don't think anyone else expected something like this.

"I'm sorry to spoil your vacation, but please make sure you all stay where we can see you as much as possible."

"If there's anything you need, we will be happy to provide it." Wǔ and Chris announced sequentially, as if trying to take the edge off for their superior. Whatever their plan is, I guess the first step is to ease everyone's anxieties.

"All right everyone, as you were. I hope you will still be able to relax and enjoy yourselves." Wǔ's words seem to have worked for now, as both families seemed somewhat relieved as they left the dining room.

After taking our leave, Juliet and I walked aimlessly together down the hallway, with Juliet looking depressed. "Relax and enjoy ourselves? How on earth are we supposed to relax now?"

When looked to for approval, I of course nodded. Who in the world would have the nerves to be able to relax in a time like this?

"…Hey, look." Juliet tugged on my sleeve. Looking in the same direction as her, I saw Wǔ and Hawthorne standing together waiting for us.

"Yo, you two. Sorry to interrupt your fun, but do you have a minute?"

"What is it?" Juliet glared at Wǔ, arms folded.

"Oh, come on, you don't need to look so angry. I just need to talk to Rikka for a second."

"You mean talk to me, who can speak for Rikka." I was happy that Juliet was protecting me, but also was a little ashamed that I needed protecting in the first place.

I took a step forward towards him in agreement, as I felt it was the least I could do.

"Right. Well, Rikka, if you don't have anything better to do, would you mind taking over for the detective? We've diverted so many resources to security at this point that, honestly, we don't have time to handle the investigation."

"Does that mean… you don't suspect Rikka at all?" Juliet had an expression that looked like a mix of relief and worry.

"I saw him take that ball to the face on the first day. Not to mention the uproar that followed. There's no way anyone that clum— er, I mean, anyone that inexperienced in self-defense would be capable of murder. Well, not that you need to be good at martial arts to kill someone, of course." As much as I'd like to object to some of what Wǔ said, he was pretty much spot on.

"Well, whatever your reasons are, I do absolutely agree that Rikka could never kill anyone. So, Rikka, what do you think? Are you up to being a detective?"

This time, being able to accept on my own, I gave a hearty nod. Hawthorne then looked at me, surprised.

"Well now. It seems you have much more initiative than I thought, considering how shy you seem. I agree, Rikka is the right choice. Since he's not affiliated with either family, we can expect his judgment to be fair and impartial."

"By the way, Doctor, why are you here, anyway?"

"Wǔ asked me to help out as well. I'm the only one here who can perform an autopsy, after all. Lamentably, I have little in terms of space or equipment, so I must confine myself to a visual examination." Ah, right, that makes sense, I suppose. Wǔ and the others may be able to treat wounds, but an autopsy is certainly something an expert would need to do. "Now then, shall we take a look at Sheringham's room?"

"That's a good point. Okay, let's go then." Turning on our heels with Juliet, the three of us made to return to the crime scene.

Seeing it again, Sheringham's corpse was surprisingly beautiful, though it didn't make me feel better about the fact that I was still looking at a dead body.

"He's pretty pale, but aside from that, he doesn't really look that dead."

"If that's what you think, try checking his wrist."

"Really? Okay, just in case…" Even though Hawthorne urged her to do it, it was still disgusting to see Juliet touch the corpse. She's a brave girl, but what could have hardened her to not even flinch at this? "…No, you're right. He doesn't have a pulse. Did you want to check his wrist too, Rikka?

I shook my head violently in response.

Violet squinted her eyes at me. "Come on, you think I like touching the body either?"

I shook my head again. I didn't understand why Juliet even agreed to touch it in the first place.

Watching me, Violet chuckled. "I'm scared too, you know. But, I also kind of feel like I'm partly to blame for his death…"

"You look even paler than he does now, Juliet. Why don't you go back to your room and get some rest? Let Rikka and I handle this."

"No, I'll stay. I wouldn't be any less scared sitting alone in my room."

Hawthorne simply gives her a shrug. "All right, if you insist… Anyway, I believe we have sufficiently verified that he is, in fact, dead. Given how much his body has cooled, I'd put his time of death at around midnight. Of course, the cause of death will be more important than the time."

"What do you think, Doctor?"

"Poison would seem the most likely answer. Still, I can't tell what sort of poison, or how it entered his bloodstream. I'm afraid that's all I can say at this point." I'm honestly a bit disappointed. I expected him to be more specific, since he's an expert.

"That's all? Isn't there anything else?"

"I may be a doctor, but I must admit that this isn't exactly my area of expertise. I can't even be sure whether this poison was mixed into food or drink, or if he was injected with it somehow. It would be one thing if I had my toxic substance detection reagent here with me, but—"

Suddenly, a knock came from the door.

"It's Chris."

"Oh, come on in." With Juliet's permission, Chris quietly enters the room.

"I'm sorry to interrupt. It looks like today is going to be rather warm, so… would it be all right if we moved Mr. Sheringham's body soon?" Ah, true, if we leave his body here, it would start rotting. It'll be fine for the short term, but I'd rather not see Holmes waste away like that, even if it's not really him.

"Oh, right. I do apologize. You must have a lot to do without waiting around for us."

"Never mind that, Doctor. What about the poison? If the killer poisoned his food or drink, what's to stop them from doing the same to ours?"

"I doubt there will be any poison in the food as long as Wǔ is cooking, but if you're worried, I'll be happy to taste it first to put you at ease." Chris said with a smile, not explaining a word more.

"What…? How can you smile about that? If it really is poisoned you could end up dead yourself!"

Chris retracted his smile, replying with a forlorn expression, "The Marble Company took me in when I was just a baby. Of course I would lay down my life for them."

"But… it's your own life. You only get one, you know? You can't just throw it away like that."

"…With all due respect, Ms. Juliet, the Marble Company is like family to me, and Ms. Ann may as well be my mother. There is no difference between me risking my life for them and you marrying someone you don't love for your family."

"Yes there is!" Juliet shouted, but soon after regained her composure. "…It's not the same at all."

"My apologies. I should never have said that. Forgive me."

"It's okay. I'm over it." And with that, Juliet had returned to her usual expression.

"All right, now that the autopsy is over, we should take Mr. Sheringham's body out of here."

Chris gave his support for the decision, "We can use the basement. It's a little desolate, but it's the best option we have. I'll take the body down there now."

"Hold on a moment," Hawthorne objected.

"Sir?"

"Rikka and I can carry the body ourselves."

"But…" Chris seemed uncomfortable, either because he was worried about letting us handle the body, or that he just didn't trust us…

Hawthorne continued to persuade him with a smile, "I'm well aware that the Marble Company doesn't have enough hands to go around right now. There's no need for you to concern yourself with this when we are perfectly capable of doing it ourselves. I'm sure we can handle such meager labor. As reward for a job well done, all I ask in exchange is that you make us a nice pot of tea. That we cannot do ourselves, after all."

Chris was hesitant after hearing Hawthorne's bargain, but finally broke down and agreed after a moment. "In that case, I would be glad to take you up on that."

"Oh, what kinds of tea do you have?" Juliet asked Chris, seemingly interested in the topic.

"Ah, I'm afraid we don't have everything currently, but we still do have a wide range with us, from famous to relatively minor. I'm certain something will be to your liking, Ms. Juliet."

"Hmm… Is it okay if I choose it myself?"

"Of course."

Hawthorne then looked to me and whispered, "Shall we?"

Chris, who must have read his lips, began escorting Juliet out of the room. "All right, let's be on our way. I'll show you to our collection. Dr. Hawthorne, Mr. Rikka, we'll wait for you later in the reception room." As we saw the two of them off, Hawthorne and I began to prepare the body by placing it on a sheet and wrapping it gently.

"Mind taking the legs?"

I did as asked, trepidatiously grabbing Sheringham's lifeless ankles. Grabbing a dead body, even through both his pants and the sheets, was revolting to me. I got in position as quickly as possible to start carrying him down to the basement.

"All right, shall we go?"

"Aah, there we are… phew." The two of us lowered him onto the basement's cold floor. "That certainly strains the lower back, doesn't it? Yet another reminder that I'm not getting any younger." I'm worn out as well. If it weren't for the fact that the body is right here with us, I might just rest here and now before returning to the reception room. "Anyway, this should be a good place for Mr. Sheringham to rest in peace. It should be cool enough down here to minimize decay. Chris certainly wasn't kidding when he said it was desolate. In fact, it's downright chilling in here, and I don't just mean in terms of temperature."

That done, Hawthorne turned to me with a wicked smile. "At any rate… it's finally just the two of us." I curse my carelessness. I have no weapons or anything else on me. If Hawthorne attacked me right now, I couldn't even defend myself. "Oh hoh! No no, I don't mean to scare you or anything like that. I merely wanted to talk to you in private. …It's better if Juliet doesn't hear this, you see." Ah, if he means to talk to me about Juliet, then I should listen carefully.

"I've known Juliet since she was a baby. Her mother and I go way back." A past lover, perchance? "Nothing unseemly, of course! There was never anything between us! …Hm, that sounds rather sad now I've said it," Hawthorne passionately denied. My own thoughts must have been showing on my face.

"Anyway, she was very popular. A boring man like myself never had a chance. Besides, she was the pride and joy of the famous Violet family. I was far too scared to even think about asking her on a date… Still, I was lucky that she did see me as a friend. She even kept up with me after she married Adamska." So he's like an 'uncle' who's actually just a family friend, so to say. "In fact, she was the one who chose me to be the Violet family's doctor after her daughters were born. I owe a great debt to the Violet family for providing me with a steady income for so many years… which is why I'm so reluctant to bring this up."

Hawthorne's expression turned bitter. "I'm guessing the Goldie and Violet families came across as typical members of the upper class to you, but they are, in fact, two of the oldest crime families in the country. All that they have is built upon violence and blood money." With the exception of Morris, they didn't really give me that impression, but I don't have a reason to not believe Hawthorne.

"However, in the past few years, they've found themselves in a dangerous position. For a long time, they were fighting each other tooth and nail for control of the city. But now both are under attack from a new enemy, and that attack has exhausted their resources. …The way things are going, they probably won't last another ten years. At worst, both could collapse. So the heads of both families arrived at the same conclusion. They would need to form an alliance… a merger of sorts. They needed a way to ensure neither would betray the other… and they decided the way to do that was to have their oldest children marry." So that's what it is. But still, a political marriage in the 21st century is a bit…

"You must be thinking how ridiculous a political marriage is, aren't you? Unfortunately, it's a decision that was made between adults after some great consideration, so not much can be done to change it." Hawthorne let out a deep sigh. As if he was Juliet's father, you could tell he was truly worried about her future. "I'm still a bachelor myself, but I care for those girls as if they were my own. Sometimes, I can't help but wish Juliet was as free-spirited as her mother. She agreed to a marriage she doesn't want, purely to help her family. It truly does grind my gears. And to make matters worse… Well, you've met Morris. Do you really think he'll be a good husband?"

I shook my head. Even as an outsider, I could easily tell how horrible Morris is.

"I concur. Morris is no more than a thug who goes about picking fights over every perceived slight to his fragile ego. And he perceives… many, to say the least. Unfortunately, he's not the only one like that in the Goldie and Violet families. Far from it. And those other thugs aren't happy about this merger. They're too concerned with what happened in the past and what's happening right now to give any thought to the future. In fact, many of them would rather have an all-out war than team up with an enemy. Both Aaron and Adamska are under a lot of pressure from their men not to go through with this. That's why Aaron decided to bring in the Marble Company. Any deal the Marble Company is present for always goes through, after all. Nobody in that city would voice an objection to this engagement with the Marble Company backing it." So the reason even the gutsy Morris was scared of Ann and her group is not only because of their strength, but because they need their backing as well…

"While this is ostensibly a four-day family trip, the true purpose here is to close the deal between these two families in secret." …What an awful situation. But why bring Rikka, an outsider, into all this? "Of course, she has every right to go ahead with this marriage if that's what she's decided, but I don't want her to make a choice she'll end up regretting. Still, she has many years ahead of her, and there's no telling what may happen down life's winding road. If Juliet ever ends up reaching out to you for help, I hope you will be there for her. Not that I have any business telling you this, as I did not even have the guts to take a chance to get properly turned down by my own youthful crush." The regrets of this middle-aged doctor bit into my heart deeply. "Now then, we'd better get back. I imagine Juliet is waiting for us with our tea."

On our way to the reception room we saw Juliet, earlier than expected, seemingly engaged in an argument. Picking up the pace up to her, I saw that Morris was the one opposite her.

"Will you let me through? My tea will get cold."

"Juuust a sec. Got somethin' I wanna talk to you about first."

When I tried to step out to help her, Hawthorne stopped me. "Looks like they're arguing about something… But, remember that they're still engaged to each other, at least for now. Let's stay here and see what happens."

"Fine. What is it?" Juliet didn't even bother to hide her discomfort.

Morris, on the other hand, had a crude smirk on his face. "Lemme just be straight with you here. Your sister's more my type, and I want you to trade places with her."

Even from this distance I could tell Juliet was angry, but she barely managed to calm herself before replying. In a hushed tone she said to Morris, "That's not something you and I can decide by ourselves."

"Well, I just thought it'd suck for you if you'd already fallen for me, y'know? So I figured I'd bring it up early. Still, doesn't look like being blunt's your thing anyway, so I don't see you answering honestly regardless. 'Course if you're set on it, I don't mind doing it with you either. You're easy on the eyes."

"You're disgusting…" Juliet flatly stated her revulsion toward him. This time, Juliet's patience was at its limit.

"What are you going to do about this, Rikka?" If I could, I'd like to throw a rock or even a ball at that scumbag. I know he's going to retaliate, but I can't take this anymore. However, before I could act, a savior appeared.

"That's enough, Mr. Morris." Chris, passing by, cautioned Morris gently, but even that was enough to make Morris jump back.

"Aw crap, it's the pretty boy with the grip of steel. Fine, I'll get outta your hair before he breaks my arm or something. I'm gonna go for a walk. Alone!" Morris broke from the conversation, halfway into a run. Scampering away with his tail between his legs like a true lowlife. Even so, it still comforted Juliet to be rid of him.

"Are you all right?"

Juliet affirms Hawthorne, "I'm all right… Just sick to my stomach." As she spoke, she looked right at me. Is she angry at me for not immediately coming to help her? "Chris, Doctor, would you mind going on ahead?"

Hawthorne and Chris gave each other a surprised look, but, understanding how Juliet must feel right now, agreed.

"Hmm, if that's what you want… Come along, Chris."

"Yes, sir. I'll start brewing a new batch of tea for us."

"Thanks. I'll be there before it gets cold."

I watched their backs as they walked away, my own stomach churning at the thought of Juliet yelling at me for not helping.

"Rikka… I'm so sorry I told you this was just a family trip when I asked you to come along." What instead came from her mouth was an unexpected apology. "I thought he might be awful, but he's about 20% worse than I had expected…"

I wanted to convey myself saying 'Only 20%!?', so I raised up two fingers at her. Seeing me try, Juliet's face broke into a smile.

"Pfft, come on, what's with that? You're so silly!" Looks like the tense atmosphere was just my imagination, and it looks like Juliet is back in high spirits as well. "Usually you're really quiet, but today you're something else!" Juliet then snatched me up into a hug.

Not really knowing where to put my hands, I rested them onto her back. "…Hehe. Thank you, Rikka. I feel a little better now. But you know, I've had a good life growing up in this family. It's thanks to them that I got into our school, and I never would have met you if I hadn't gone there. I'm grateful to them for that. So, I cannot run away from my duties now. I am the eldest daughter, after all." I can feel Juliet sigh into my chest. This close, even an injured whisper should be able to reach her…

"Why don't we run away from all this together?" I couldn't help but clutch my throat again as the words came from my mouth. It's a strange sensation, as if I'm making someone else say my words.

"Hey, y-your voice…" Juliet covered my mouth with her hand, looking around. Fortunately, there was no one around to hear. Juliet slowly pulled her hand away before returning to the topic. "That's sweet of you, but I can't. If I ran, my sister would have to take my place. I can't do that to her… Plus, that'd be giving Morris exactly what he'd want."

Looks like Juliet has already accepted that she's going to marry Morris… But more like a… twisted sort of resignation, where she's going to go down swinging.

Maybe because of my bad habit of showing my thoughts on my face, Juliet began to get angry with me. "Hey, what's with the look? I didn't bring you along so you could make faces at me!" Juliet pushed me away with both hands. She certainly didn't mean to hurt me or anything, but she was surprisingly strong. Losing my footing, I stumbled backwards and slammed my head against the wall.

Oh… this is really bad. Temporarily blacking out from the crushing pain, next thing I knew I was slumped over on the ground in the hallway. I could feel the darkness coming over my vision again…

"Huh? No, Rikka! You mustn't! Rikka!? Rikka, hang in there!" Juliet's worried voice led me off as I took my leave of the Kogetsukan once again.

I knew what was going to happen even before I woke up. When I opened my eyes, just as I expected, I was in my room at Chaldea. Seeing me sit up in my bed, Mash, Holmes and Moriarty's discussion stops.

"Huh, that was quick. You weren't even asleep for an hour."

"Wha—? I could've sworn it was much longer…" Now that the professor mentions it, everyone who was in my room the last time I was awake is still here. I guess I woke back up while they were still discussing what to do next.

Holmes, seeing my vexed self, had a flash of realization on his face. "It would seem that time passes differently in your dreamworld. How fortunate; I was just thinking how helpful more data would be. Now then, what happened over there?"

Explaining everything to them was relatively easy, partly because of the short amount of time I had been awake before getting knocked out.

"…That was when Juliet shoved you, and you fell unconscious?" Getting asked about it by Mash made me realize just how embarrassing it was. Moriarty was even off across the room laughing about it.

"Ahhh, how unfortunate for you! Still… hahaha, hahahahahahaha! It seems someone else was even more unfortunate! Still… what a… heh… tragic turn of events!" Now, though, I realized that it wasn't me who Moriarty was laughing at. "Don't you agree, Sheringham? Oh, my apologies, I just don't know how I got those names mixed up! Holmes! The great Sherlock Holmes, rubbed out in the first act! Not even I would have ever seen it coming! Bah-hahahahahahahahaha!"

Mash, surprised, whispered softly into my ear, "Senpai, I've never seen the professor so euphoric before!"

"I know! It's like he rediscovered his inner child." I had to wonder how Holmes would respond to Moriarty's cacophonous teasing.

"…Baritsu."

What a blatant show of force! Holmes kicked Moriarty away with his signature martial art baritsu, sending him rolling into a corner of the room screaming, "Egads!" and, "Ouch!" the whole way.

"I do beg your pardon, but I'm trying to think. Would you kindly keep it down?" Despite how calmly he spoke, it was absolutely clear he was furious with Moriarty's laughing fit. "…Still, I must say, I'm disappointed to hear the detective was the first to step off the stage. Detective work is fraught with danger, and any gentleman worth his salt should have known to master a martial art or two for his own self-defense. Poor Sheringham clearly needed more training."

"You're one to talk, given that your self-defense consists of shielding yourself with the culprit." Moriarty nursed his waist for a bit, before standing up straight. He may just be feigning strength in front of us, but he's a smart man, so I'm sure he's fine. "That aside, something about Sheringham's death nags at me. It would make more sense had it been anyone else."

"What do you mean, Professor Moriarty?" I asked before even bothering to think about it myself. I can't waste time with the whole random consciousness loss thing going on.

"Assuming that whoever made the threat is among the other characters, Sheringham's arrival must have thrown a wrench in their plans," Moriarty, pleased with my question, happily explained his thinking. "Let's further assume that the culprit made a number of preparations in the Kogetsukan. Assuming they have done so, then murdering Sheringham puts our culprit in a bit of a bind, since they had not prepared anything for him in advance. Which means they must have made a mistake somewhere. I certainly understand the desire to rid oneself of an unwelcome visitor, but I can't say I approve of this rushed, artless approach."

Mash nodded her head along with his explanation, genuinely impressed. "…I see. So the culprit would just as soon have not committed this murder unless they had no choice… Does that mean Holmes's death was a spur-of-the-moment decision?"

"Sheringham, Ms. Kyrielight. I assure you, I am still very much alive," Holmes corrected her, dismayed.

Looking at his rival, thoroughly amused, Moriarty resumed explaining his theory. "Indeed. I doubt our culprit is in a position to simply gallivant about, murdering as they please. As soon as someone dies, the survivors become much more wary, serving only to complicate the act of carrying out your intended murder. Assuming this is not a matter of vengeance, your first victim should always be the one you had intended to kill from the start. But that wasn't true for Sheringham. He was not involved with either of the families. Killing him now must have been a deeply bitter pill for the culprit to swallow."

"Um, why do you think Sheringham was killed, Professor Moriarty?"

At Mash's question, Moriarty gave a bewildered look. "You need to ask!? He was in the culprit's way, obviously. Believe me, I can understand how they felt! If an unbearably smug-looking detective showed up like he was running the show amid one of my own schemes, I'd want to send him home in a coffin too! The detective's presence carries with it the risk of interference in the culprit's plans, or having them exposed once those plans are carried out. Detectives represent any number of problems for criminals, you know! Disposing of them before the plot truly begins is absolutely the best course."

"That's terrible…"

"Loath as I am to admit it, I have to agree. If I were a criminal, I would do the same thing. Furthermore, by killing the detective off first, the person who made the threat has shown they are not afraid to get their hands dirty. Come to think of it, there was a new development on our end while you were off in dreamland." Holmes tapped on the nearby whiteboard.

"I wasn't able to track down the Marble Company, but I did find two other corporations named Goldie Co. and Violet Inc. They are both headquartered in a major American city, and have vied for control over it for quite some time. The CEOs of the two companies are listed as Aaron Goldie and Adamska Violet. It all lines up perfectly."

"Unfortunately, we weren't able to get any information on the two families…"

Moriarty followed up on Mash's interjection, "That doesn't surprise me. Any decent underworld organization leader knows their enemies can get to them through their families, and are sure to keep a tight lid on information regarding them."

"…This is really happening, right now. Not in the past, or the future, or in a Singularity."

"Indeed. I'm still doing everything I can to find out more about them. I'll make sure to have more detailed information by the next time you wake up."

"Is that the best the world's greatest detective can do? Give me one of the Command Room's terminals, and I'll have the answers for you in an instant."

"Hah, I could never be so foolish or intoxicated as to hand over the master key to a known thief! Besides, not even I can get into the Command Room's mainframe. That is a black box if ever I saw one. I couldn't even get clearance when I had copied the Director of Seraphix's credentials." How can you just blurt out something like that—

The moment that thought entered my mind, I felt the tug of sleep again. I could still keep myself awake, but it seemed my time was almost up.

"Wait, you two! Senpai looks like he's about to drift off again!"

"Well now, it seems we've droned on a bit too long. Based on what you've told us, it's clear who Sheringham was meeting with. Try to stay awake a little longer, and I'll tell you what I know." Dropping that on me, I knew I had to force myself to stay awake. If I can get this information, it'll be invaluable for when I go back to sleep.

"It's clear who Sheringham was meeting with…? What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I said. If no one there is left-handed, that tells us all we need to know about his guest."

"But, couldn't the culprit just use their nondominant hand to cover things up…?"

"Perhaps when meeting someone for the first time, yes, but you are unlikely to be able to hide your dominant hand from someone you've spent a deal of time with. With the notable exception of Sheringham, each of our characters here belongs to his or her respective communities. Factions, if you like. You attended a meal where everyone was present, right? If there was a southpaw present who suddenly began using their right hand, someone would have said something. Given that did not happen, we can conclude that no one there is left-handed."

Moriarty interrupted with a nasty smile, "I do so hate to nitpick, but what if someone there is secretly ambidextrous?"

Holmes counters effortlessly, "It wouldn't make any difference, Professor. An ambidextrous person, by definition, would have no issue using their right hand. But according to Chris, Sheringham specifically requested a left-handed teacup for his guest. Would this have been necessary if they could simply use their right hand? If you have an answer to that question, I'm happy to hear it."

"Hmph. So my playing the devil's advocate only strengthened your case. Well, no matter, as I actually do happen to agree with you. Do go on."

"Well, if one were to nitpick my hypothesis… I cannot deny the possibility that Sheringham could have been meeting with Rikka."

"Senpai's the culprit?"

I was so tired that I could barely open my mouth, but I managed to get out my denial. "No way! I was already asleep!" Thanks to that shock, I was jolted awake a bit.

Holmes looked like he was enjoying himself. "Hahaha, it seems I may have touched a nerve. Not to worry, that possibility is extremely remote. I can't speak for your dream body's original owner, of course, but based on what you've told us, you wouldn't have had the time."

"What about a third party…? Some Mysterious Character X who's still hiding out in the Kogetsukan somewhere?" Mash asked nervously, worrying about me, I'm sure.

"No need for such intricacies, Ms. Kyrielight. Occam's razor provides us with a perfectly reasonable explanation. There is a character here who needs to use his left hand… thanks to the injury he suffered on his right."

Hey, yeah…!

"Morris!" As the name popped into my own head, Mash said it for me. That's my kouhai!

"Most likely, Sheringham noticed Morris's injured right hand and requested the left-handed cup out of consideration."

"But then, why would Sheringham feel a need to hide his meeting with Morris from Chris?"

"Ah, but there I am afraid you have it backwards, Ms. Kyrielight. Sheringham wasn't trying to hide Morris from Chris. It was Chris that he was trying to hide from Morris, in point of fact. At least, he wished to hide that Chris was bringing the tea. Chris was also the one responsible for Morris's injured hand, after all. Sheringham would have known that so much as hearing Chris's voice could easily put Morris in a foul mood. And as a detective, he would also be well aware that information often freely given is all but impossible to drag out of someone when they are in a foul mood." When he puts it like that, I can definitely see his point. If only Holmes could come with me, things would be so much easier.

"But, Morris never said anything about meeting with Sheringham…"

"Given what Mr. Fujimaru has told us so far, we know that Morris is both distrustful and simple-minded. It is no surprise that he would try to hide his meeting with someone who is now dead. Speaking up now would only arouse suspicion. Even Morris no doubt realizes others are prone to think the worst of him."

Agh, I think I'm hitting my limit…

"I… can't stay… awake…"

"Senpai!?" My eyelids slammed shut, but I could at least feel the warmth of Mash's hands on my arm.

"Hmm, it would seem we are out of time. But at least we were able to cover the most pressing matters, albeit briefly. Be sure to keep everything we discussed in mind as you go about investigating this incident. Remember, you are assuming the role of another person. Even if you cannot take any decisive action yourself, you can still keep a close eye on the events that play around you. You'd do well not to forget that."

"Right! Every good detective starts by gathering information, after all!" Just as I was about to lose consciousness, I felt the gentle gust of breath on my ear. "I know it's technically a dream for you, Senpai, but please do your best to stay alert!"

Swapping consciousnesses again, I found myself resting in the corner of a familiar hallway. …Looks like I'm not too far from where Juliet pushed me. Maybe I wasn't knocked out for that long?

As I sat up from my slump, Hawthorne and Juliet both rushed over from nearby, letting out a sigh of relief simultaneously.

"Ah, thank goodness, you're awake. I was quite taken aback to learn you passed out after Juliet shoved you."

"I'm so sorry, Rikka. I guess I'm no better than Cain…"

"Oh, it seems I was too slow to be of use." It was Chris whose voice came next. I assume he was about to carry me to the bed in my room.

"Yes, it seems it was a false alarm. Sorry to pull you away from the tea so suddenly."

"Shall I still escort you to your room just in case?"

I shook my head frenziedly. As long as I'm conscious, I'd rather not have the embarrassment of being princess carried or piggybacked.

"No need to be shy! My purpose here is to be of service, after all." If I don't assert myself, he'll just pick me up anyway—

Wait, no, I need to let them know about Morris first. I can't talk, though… After thinking about it, I decided to use my body to communicate, gesturing for writing materials. All three of them just looked at me, confused, but this is too important to just give up after failing once or twice. I repeat my charades performance, and I finally get a reaction, one of Juliet giggling uncontrollably.

"Hahah! What's with you? Are you trying to make me laugh to feel better?"

"Rikka, did you receive a flash of insight, or something of the sort? Aahh, I see, you need something to write with for this…"

On the verge of tears, I gave Hawthorne my pleading thanks for finally realizing what I needed.

"I see. It does sound like it could have been Morris." With paper, pen, and assistance from gestures, I was finally able to convey Holmes's deduction. I must have looked like a fool, but it was worth it in the end.

"Indeed. We do know that Morris injured his right hand, and it may have gotten worse after, in a misguided feat of machismo, he refused treatment."

"If only I had known my own strength…" Chris spoke, heartbroken. Lamenting the fact that he injured Morris, or his own inexperience…?

"Hey, don't beat yourself up. It turned out to be for the best. Now we know who Sheringham met with."

"Hey Chris, you seen Morris anywhere?" Wǔ suddenly appeared without the sound of even a single footstep, startling Juliet. "Whoops, shījìng, sorry for that. So, Chris?"

"No, I haven't… We were actually just looking for him ourselves."

"I see. I've been turning the mansion upside down looking for him, but no dice…"

Next, Ann came into the hall. Did she sense there was a problem brewing when she saw her subordinates together? “Is there an issue, you two?”

“Hey, Sis. The truth is…”

After listening to Wǔ’s whispered explanation, she gave a nod. “I see… He might have come back after the fact. I’ll keep looking around the mansion. You and Chris go check outside.”

“Got it!” Wǔ and Chris joined their voices together and ran towards the entrance as ordered.

“We’ll help you look too. Come on, Rikka,” Juliet said before hurriedly following behind them.

I followed Wǔ and the others outside to a place that… was honestly more like a rainforest than a yard. I had no idea that the Kogetsukan even had something like this on the island.

“…We’ve kind of been letting the place go to seed, so it’s a bit of a jungle right now.” I definitely wouldn’t call this just ‘a bit.’ I wouldn’t even be surprised if one or two Jaguar Warriors popped out of the brush.

“It’s so dense out here. This would be a perfect place to lay low.”

“I don’t know about that…”

Suddenly, the bushes shook, and a number of beasts came pouncing out. Now recognizing them as a pack of wild wolves, they growled threateningly as they slowly surrounded us.

“Especially not with these things running around out here. We’d better chase them away, Chris.”

“Right!”

The way Wǔ and Chris fought was strikingly magnificent. In Chaldea, there are a number of Servants who are skilled martial artists, but even compared to them they were expertly skilled in their own right. While taking care to protect the two non-combatants with them, they managed to push back the wolf pack without letting a scratch come upon us.

“Haaah!” The wolf who was the current target of Chris’s ire was flipped over from his kick, slamming its back onto the ground. The wolf quickly shook off the blow, but we could tell it was starting to become fearful of him.

“Wow… You’re making these wolves look about as dangerous as puppies.” As Juliet was saying this, Wǔ let loose a wild kick. I had thought that he was going to shove his leg straight through the wolf, but he stopped just short of touching it.

“The next one’ll hit your nose for real.” As if his words were actually understood, the wolves lost their will to fight and literally turned tail. I guess the ‘flight’ part of their fight or flight reflex finally kicked in.

“I’m all done here.”

"Same. Still no sign of the prodigal son, though." The two of them searched in the grass a while longer looking for Morris, but eventually gave up when the both found no sign of him.

"All I'm seeing out here is more wild animals… I guess he isn't out here after all."

"This could be a great place to lay low, but not for a pampered city boy. He could try, but he'd just end up wolf food if he did. Catch my drift?"

"Hey, don't say things like that. You're scaring me." Juliet scratched and gripped her arm. Wǔ's joke may have been too grisly for her to imagine herself.

"Don't worry, Ms. Juliet. We haven't seen any signs that Mr. Morris was attacked."

"If he's not out here, that just leaves the sea… But I really doubt he'd be out there. There are strong currents out there, and we're much too far from the mainland for an amateur to swim for it. Guess there was no sense looking out here. Let's go back."

With nobody disagreeing with Wǔ, we all decided to head inside.

As the search party disappears from the forest, a lone figure crawls out of the grass. "…Finally, they're gone…" the figure mumbled to themself, letting it reach none but their own ears, though the only ones who could possibly hear were the wolves anyway. "I'm impressed that those bodyguards knew enough to look in this place. And that Wǔ's skill really does live up to their reputation." The man dashed through the bushes, opposite the direction of Wǔ and the others, disappearing back into the greenery.

When we entered back into the mansion, the first person to greet us all was Harriet.

"Oh, Juliet, welcome back. Any luck?"

"I'm afraid not. We didn't see any sign of him anywhere."

"Well, not like I really care. Though, you do have leaves in your hair now. Go take a bath later."

"I do?" Hearing Harriet's comment, Juliet ran her fingers through her hair, but her concern was interrupted by the near-shattering sound of a drinking glass slamming on the table. Looking over, we found Aaron, only a hair's breadth away from being completely trashed, staring directly at us.

"Where is Morris!? Hasn't anyone found him yet!?" His words were primarily directed at the people of the Marble Company, but as someone who was just helping them with the search, I couldn't help but feel like I was shouldering some of his scorn.

"Honey, I think you've had a little too much to drink…" Dorothy placed her hand on Aaron's arm, looking worried.

"Shut up. No way am I making it through this without a stiff drink. I can't believe Morris is missing…"

Ann stepped in, seeing her subordinates wondering how to pacify Aaron. "Our first priority is to keep all of you safe, so I'm afraid we can only spare so many resources to look for Morris."

"What could be a higher priority than Morris's life!? He is my heir!" Aaron sloppily poured himself another glass. As he put the bottle down, Laurie tugged on his sleeve.

"Daddy? Why is Morris missing?"

"Not now, Laurie! Be quiet." Dorothy rushed to Laurie's side, pulling her away from Aaron with a hug. Even if Aaron wasn't going to raise his hand to her, she must have decided it's best not to irritate him.

But that couldn't stop Laurie from talking. "Is it because he killed the detective guy?" The tension in the room suddenly became as thick as water.

Aaron put down his glass and glared at Laurie.

"Laurie, don't say things like that." Dorothy offered her daughter a nurturing tone of voice, but Laurie puffed up her cheeks in frustration in return.

"But I saw him coming out of the detective guy's room last night!"

"Y-you don't mean that, right, Laurie? You and I were both asleep at the time." Rather than asking Laurie, it seemed like she was instead pleading with the audience in the room to not take it seriously. However, that intention went completely over Laurie's head.

"I woke up real late and snuck out. When I did, I saw him leaving the detective guy's room!" A story told this insistently, even from a child, just begs to be believed.

Even Adamska, who has consistently been fearful towards Aaron until now, finally cast a suspicious gaze upon him.

"C-come now, we're not going to take the word of a child seriously for something so important, are we?"

"We don't want to believe it ourselves, Aaron. But… don't you think she might be telling the truth, as there's nothing for her to gain by lying?"

"Even if she did see him coming out of his room, that is not proof Morris killed Sheringham!" Aaron shouted, slamming his fists onto the table.

"Honey, please calm down."

Aaron, cooling down from his wife's words, hung his head, ashamed of his outburst. "…It seems I let my emotions get the better of me. I'm sorry you had to see that."

"Not at all. I should be apologizing for my lack of tact."

"We may not be able to say for sure whether Morris is the killer, but wherever he is, there is every chance that he decides to stay in hiding now. If he does, the consequences for the Goldie family could be devastating, and our arrangement would come to a grinding halt."

"We would much rather it not come to that as well…"

"Then given the circumstances, I have a confession to make. Not even my wife, Dorothy, knows about this." Dorothy's already big eyes went even wider. Looks like he's telling the truth.

"What are you talking about, honey?"

"I was hoping to take this with me to my grave, but it seems that's no longer an option. The truth is… I am Chris's father."

"Huh!?"

"Mr. Aaron!?" Dorothy and Chris exclaimed their surprise together.

"Chris… From the look on your face, I see the company never told you."

Ann just looked at Chris in silence. From her reaction, she seemed to know what was going on, but didn't stop Aaron or comment on it.

"I was once young and foolish myself. I calmed down somewhat once I married, but I did still have a… habit of spending the night with women who really caught my eye. That's how you were born, Chris. But by then, I had already married my now ex-wife, and we'd had Morris together. I couldn't take you in under the circumstances, so I asked the Marble Company to look after you. Of course, I agreed to pay for your upbringing as well."

"…I had no idea." Chris must have accepted that he would have no blood relatives ages ago. He seemed now to be confused and shaken by the sudden admittance of his true father.

"Morris will, of course, always be the apple of my eye. But I am the head of the Goldie family, and so must always do what is necessary for its survival."

"Wait a second… You're not seriously telling us to hand over Chris, are you?" Wǔ asked, not bothering to hide his aggression.

"You're damn right I am! You're the ones who let Sheringham die, and failed to stop Morris from running away. If anyone is responsible for this mess, it's the Marble Company!"

"You're absolutely right. Fortunately, Chris is still an apprentice. We can afford to let him go."

"What!?" Ann's response blindsided Wǔ. "You're still calling him an apprentice after all the time we spent training him? Besides, Sis, I know how fond you are of hi—"

"That's enough, Wǔ!"

Seeing Ann resolved to her decision, Wǔ backs off from her. "I guess this is a done deal then. All right, I got it," Wǔ said somewhat coldly, patting Chris on the shoulder. "Looks like you're in luck, Chris. One of these days, you'll be taking over for the whole Goldie family."

Despite his friend's words, Chris looked decidedly uncomfortable. He's probably still sorting out his own thoughts after having a trade like this dropped on him.

Aaron, ignoring Chris's discomfort, continued the conversation, "Naturally, I'll be happy to compensate you for the loss. I want to remain on good terms with the Marble Company, after all."

"I understand. As of now, Chris is in your care, no longer with the Marble Company—"

"Wait, Ms. Ann!" The demand came in a voice close to a scream. "I know I'm out of line for requesting this, but please, let me finish my job here first. It's the least I can do to pay the company back."

Ann looked at Chris in the eyes for a while. Then, as if giving in, said, “Very well. I’ll continue to treat you as a Marble Company man until we leave this island.” Chris looked relieved at Ann’s acceptance, contrasting with Aaron’s bitter expression.

“I will not allow the man I’ve named my successor to be treated as a common serv—”

Ann glanced at Aaron with frigid eyes. Without voicing it, it was clear that anything other than agreement was not an option.

“…No, never mind. I can see this is a matter of integrity. I will permit it this one time.”

“Thank you for understanding.” Chris then turned to Ann, bowing deeply. “And Ms. Ann… thank you, for everything. I’ll never forget what you did for me.”

Ann gave no response, just looking at Chris again. I can’t imagine what she must be feeling inside, having to let go of the boy she’s raised for so many years. She doesn’t show it on her face, but I’m sure she’s grieving in her own way.

Hawthorne, unexpectedly, stepped into the conversation, questioning in a concerned voice, “Hold on. If Chris is joining the Goldie family, then, that would mean…”

“Yes, Juliet will instead be engaged to Chris. That will serve to fulfill our mutual goal,” Aaron boldly stated, regaining his composure.

Juliet, on the other hand, was at a complete loss of words. “Wha—”

“What’s the problem? This is turning out to be a good deal. You should be happy about it,” Eva encouraged Juliet with a smile.

Chris himself came over to her as well, giving her a bow. “Ms. Juliet, I know I still have a lot to learn, but I hope I can earn your trust in time.”

“Oh, uh… okay. That… sounds nice…” Juliet’s voice wavered in response.

“Don’t be so subservient, Chris. You don’t need to worry about what other people think of you now. You’ll be running the Goldie— no, both the Goldie and the Violet families one day! Hahahaha!” Despite supposedly being a joyous occasion, Aaron’s raucous laughter did nothing but grate on my nerves.

Tonight’s dinner was even more delicious than yesterday’s, perhaps because the good mood of the families during their chat over the food was rubbing off on me.

“What a delectable combination of quality ingredients with a quality chef. The only problem is that it might even be too tasty for my own good! Ahh, where did I put my antacids?” Hawthorne spoke as he rummaged through his pockets.

“Haah…” Juliet sighed beside him.

“Is something wrong, my dear girl? …Do you need some antacids too?”

“No, that’s okay. It’s not my stomach,” Juliet replies tersely, but Hawthorne still seemed to get her meaning.

"Ah yes, you must have a lot on your mind right now, processing the new terms of your engagement. But I daresay this was a lucky break. I know I would much rather marry Chris than Morris. Don't you agree, Rikka?"

I nodded my head in agreement and looked at Juliet, but her expression became increasingly angry.

"…Are you serious?" And now I know I really shouldn't have done that. Hawthorne and I have just stepped on a landmine inside Juliet's heart. "Why are you all happy about this? What is wrong with you!?" Juliet began getting up from her seat, picking up her pace as she spat her last sentence out. That was probably an indication that she didn't want to be followed.

"Where are you going, Juliet?

"I'm going to my room. Good night!" Juliet said as she quickly stormed off.

"Oh dear. Long as I've lived, I still don't understand women." No, I think this is your bad, not hers, Hawthorne… "Yes, yes, you don't even have to say it. I shouldn't have said that. Let me go apologize to her. Even if it's through the door, the sooner the better." Hawthorne picked himself up and ran after her.

Going back to her room… I should probably go back to mine as well, then, and check in with Chaldea early. As I was about to act on that thought, I noticed Harriet watching me from a distance.

"Ah, Rikka!" …And now that I've been called out to, I can't just ignore her. In fact, I'd probably even lose some points with Juliet if I did. Not exactly knowing how to interact with Harriet, I simply walked up to her at her call.

"Hehe, I heard the whole thing. A little lovers spat between you two?"

I shake my head in a panic. Harriet must have really, really misunderstood what was going on.

"You don't have to deny it so vehemently. You'll make Juliet sad, after all. Besides, it doesn't really matter what you think, this is about how Juliet feels."

…I don't know how to react, so I just nod along with her.

"Well, I'm sure Chris will make a great husband. Juliet knows that too. But it's just not that simple… Then again, I guess it's that naïveté of yours that tugged at her heartstrings in the first place."

Since coming to the Kogetsukan, I've tried to keep the relationship between Juliet and I as just friends. But if that wasn't what she wanted… then maybe I've been doing something wrong this whole time, just like with what just happened.

"Did you know she hardly has any friends? In fact, you're the only one she's got left."

My eyes went wide in surprise. I can't believe that a girl as charming as Juliet would have no other friends.

"You really didn't realize, then. Didn't you ever run into some shady people at college trying to scare you about us? You know, people warning you that even though the Violet family is famous, there are a lot of nasty rumors about us? Warning you that spending time

around a daughter of that family will mess up your chances at a good life? Stuff like that? I'm pretty sure some Goldie family supporters were behind it. It was a really cheap move on their part." What an awful thing to do… But when threatened by thugs like Morris, the average person would probably keep their distance after.

"But, I can't say the rumors were all complete fabrications, either. You do have to get nasty sometimes to keep control over an entire city. Our way of life is built upon the blood, sweat and tears of many people… some of them dead. We're mostly used to things being that way, but Juliet's always had a harder time with it. That's why everyone who approached her just because she was the pretty daughter of a wealthy family… ended up running away. Juliet knew about our family's reputation too, of course, so she understood when people she thought of as friends stopped spending time with her. But understanding why doesn't make things any easier. It really devastated her, even to the point where she'd cry herself to sleep sometimes. That's why she was so glad when you didn't let those rumors drive you away. I honestly don't know what she would have done without you."

Rikka Fujimahr… you really are an oddball… or maybe you've just got a lot of guts.

"In that sense, you're very special to her, and I hope you'll remain by her side, as long as you're still okay with it."

I gave her a vague nod. I'm sure Rikka would agree, but I don't feel comfortable speaking for Rikka's deeper feelings.

"Well, good night, sweet little Mr. Boyfriend."

After parting ways with Harriet, I hurried to my room and crawled into bed before I could possibly get stopped by anyone else.

Somewhere in a darkened room of the mansion, a person sat holding onto their knees. *It's great being a kid… Nobody ever gets mad at you for clowning around,* the person thought, hiding their breath in the darkness. *But the best part… is that nobody ever suspects you.* Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. The figure prepared for their visitor. *Someone's here…* In an instant, light illuminated the room.

Dorothy speaks with a worried expression, "There you are, Laurie! First you sneak out of bed again, and now I find you hiding in this pitch-black room? With Cain, no less!"

Laurie and Cain, hugging their knees in the corner, looked at each other.

"Oh, it's Mommy. Looks like she found us, Cain."

"Yep! Guess so."

Laurie gets up quickly and runs over to Dorothy, attempting to calm her anger with a hug.

"Oh Laurie, I was so worried when I didn't see you anywhere after I woke up. You have to tell me when you want to play hide-and-seek."

"But you always make me go to bed too early. I wanna stay up and keep playing."

"Sorry, Laurie, but the game's over once you're found. We'll just have to pick this up tomorrow!"

Dorothy gives Cain a smile as he convinces her to wind down. "…Thank you, Cain. Morris never plays with her like this. She's so happy to have a new big brother."

"Hehehehe, I like being a big brother, too! My sisters have always been weirdly… grown-up I guess?"

Dorothy, starting to take a shine to the boy, replied happily, "I can see that. All right, it's getting late. Time to go back to bed."

"'Kaaay."

"All right, I'm gonna sleep too. Now, where's that light switch…"

As they part ways, the room now dark again, the person secretly thinks, *Yup, I love being a kid. No one ever suspects the kid.*

"Really!? Juliet and Chris!?" Returning to Chaldea once again, I explained everything that transpired, to which Mash was more excited than ever.

"So our fair princess finds herself betrothed not to a common ruffian, but a perfect prince now… I suppose it does make for a happy ending of sorts, but in narrative terms it still seems… lacking," Holmes says like a professional critic.

"I think this is a wonderful development, myself… I'm so happy for Juliet I could burst!" Right after saying that, a sad expression came over Mash's face, probably remembering about the rest of the situation surrounding Juliet. "But, then again… I guess this isn't really the time to be sayin that sort of thing, is it… Not with Sheringham murdered and Morris missing…"

"There is presently little sense in discussing Morris's possible whereabouts. There are more important matters to discuss."

"Indeed. Namely, the surprise reveal of a new Goldie family heir, which may make him a new target," Moriarty interrupted.

Mash gave a look that could best be described as grief-stricken. "Oh… You think Chris's life is in danger now, too?"

Holmes has a laugh at Mash asking such a question. "If the culprit's goal is to prevent the two families from coming together, then it's quite possible they were involved in Morris's disappearance as well. If that is so, the revelation about Chris will have completely blindsided them. As such, they may need to resort to brute force once again."

"Another unexpected development, eh. Between the detective's sudden appearance and the surprise of Chris's parentage, it would seem that luck is against our dear criminal. Just when they thought they had eliminated the Goldie family's sole heir, a new candidate presents himself."

"If the culprit is going to make another move, it will almost certainly be at night. They won't want to miss this opportunity, after all. I expect they'll either go after Chris or Juliet."

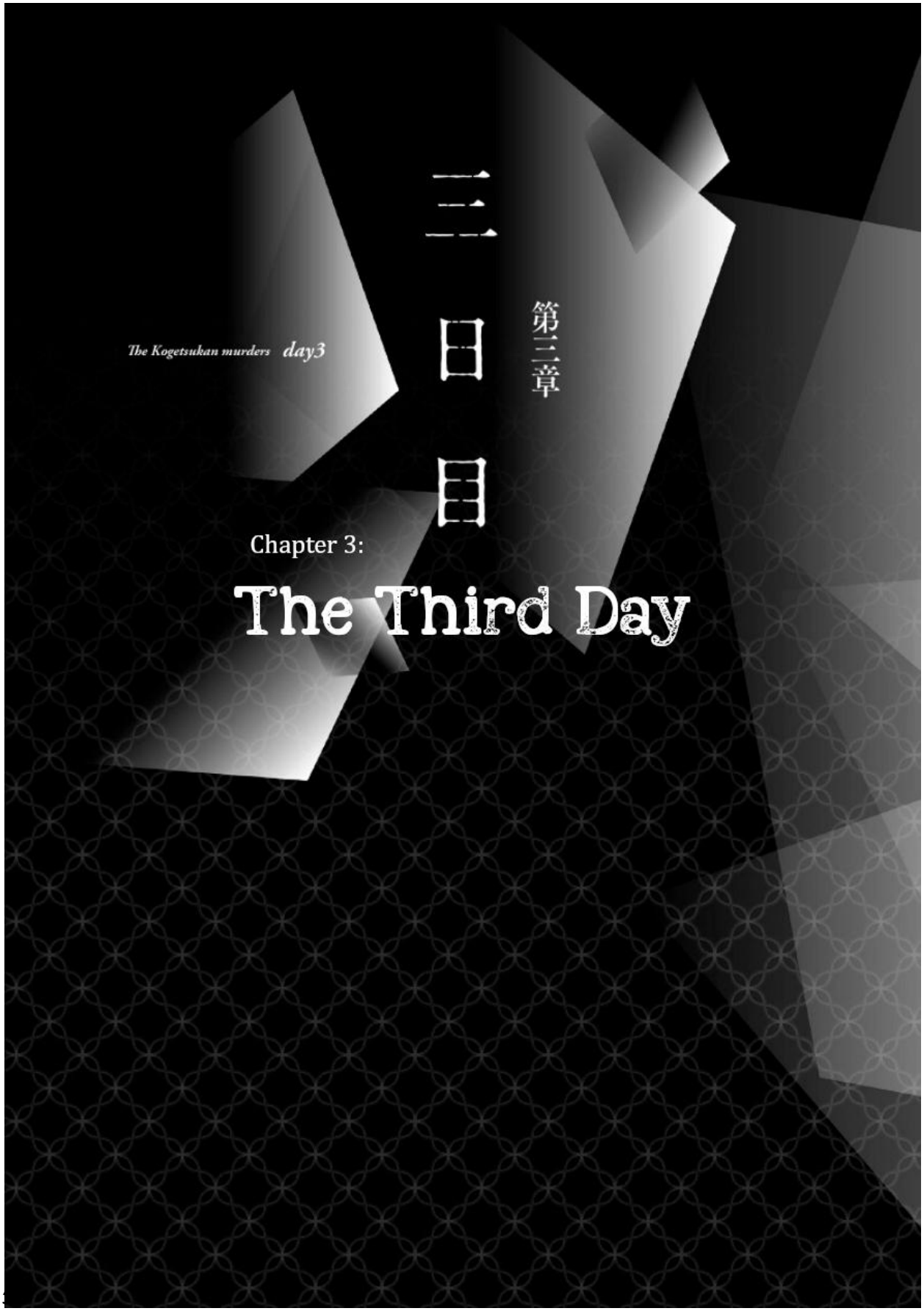
Juliet might end up dead!? I've gotta get back there now and stop them! It doesn't matter if we can solve the case, the dead won't be brought back. And I know Rikka Fujimahr

wouldn't want to live in a world without Juliet in it! The more and more I thought about it, the more and more I felt I needed to go back to the Kogetsukan. But I've slept so much recently, I don't feel even a slightest bit drowsy. I knew the only other option I had left. I got up from bed, and started ramming my head against the nearest wall. As long as I can make myself faint, I can get back over there as soon as now.

"Stop, Senpai! You could give yourself a concussion!"

"Calm down, Mr. Fujimaru. Even should you manage to knock yourself out, there is no guarantee that you will wake up at the Kogetsukan straight away." After already bashing my head two or three times, Holmes presented me with a good argument. He's not wrong, and if I don't wake up there immediately after knocking myself out, I'd just be hurting myself for no real reason. "At any rate, you need to steel yourself for whatever tragedy may come next if you are to continue your investigation with a clear mind. Though, of course, it would be best if there were no more tragedies at all…"

After they talked me down, I spent a while simply looking at the ceiling of my room, trying not to think about it. After a bit, I had somehow slipped back into my slumber without even realizing.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Chapter 3:
The Third Day

Chapter 3: The Third Day

I woke up to the morning sun's glare peeking through the curtains. Reluctantly opening my eyes, I found I had returned to my room in the Kogetsukan once more. I absentmindedly shut the curtains more tightly, planning to go back to sleep, but it was then that I remembered what I was doing and jumped into action. I barely managed to get dressed adequately before dashing out into the hallway towards Juliet's room. Please be safe, Juliet…

At Juliet's room, I found her door to be locked, as it should be. Unless I'm in some locked-room mystery, she should be safe—… No, I'm not going to leave until I see her with my own eyes. With this goal in my mind, I started to knock on her door repeatedly.

After about five minutes, Juliet finally opened her door. "What is it? Do you have any idea what time it is? I was having a really good dream, you know…" she said, not even having makeup on. Looks like she just got out of bed. "Well, just hurry up and get inside. I don't want Chris or Wǔ to see me without my makeup…" Juliet gestured for me to come into her room.

Over about 30 minutes, I managed to convey everything that Holmes and Moriarty had deduced and predicted. Juliet listened to it all while putting on makeup and changing her clothes.

Finally, after a bit, she opened her mouth, as if just finishing digesting the information, "Now I see. You think someone here wants to put an end to the engagement. I don't think there's anything to worry about, though. I mean, if our families don't join forces, then either we go down fighting each other, or end up falling victim to some outside power… Everyone here knows that. That's why even Morris is going along with this. So, I don't think there's going to be any more murders. I mean, what would be the point?" If that's so, then I might as well have just slept in… "But we can't rest easy just yet. We should go check on Chris too, just to be sure. Ready to go?" Before I knew it, Juliet had put on her finishing touches and was already stepping out of the room.

On the way to Chris's room we ran into Wǔ. Despite only being about 6:30, he was already up and about to prepare breakfast.

"Oh, morning. Where're you two off to so early?"

"…We just wanted to check in on Chris." I'm impressed Juliet was able to hold back from blurting out that there's a chance he could be dead.

"Oh man, what a lucky guy he is. I wish I had a beautiful girl to wake me up," Wǔ laughs, not seeming to give us any mind. "That works out nicely, anyway. I was just wondering when he'd be getting up. I could use his help with some chores, but I wanted him to get a good night's sleep and didn't want to have to wake him up. I mean, he is gonna be an important client of ours soon."

"Well then, let's all go wake him up together."

With that, the three of us all went to Chris's room together. If, in the worst case scenario, Chris did get killed, and on top of that the killer was still in his room, it would be nice to have Wǔ with us for protection.

After a bit of a walk, our group arrived in front of Chris's doorstep.

"I think this was his room, right? Good morning Chris. Are you up yet?" Juliet gave the door a knock alongside her voice, but there was no answer. "Is Chris not a morning person or something?"

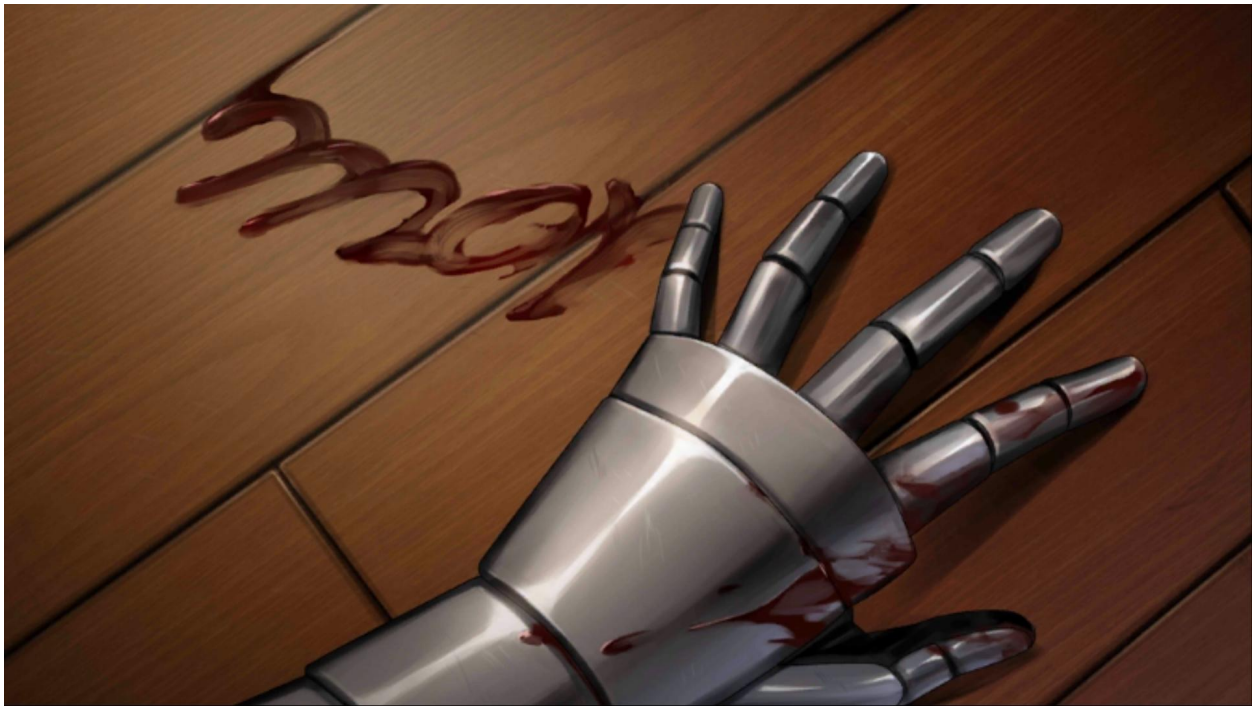
"That shouldn't be an issue. He's been trained to wake up if he hears anything suspicious."

"That's strange. Then why would—" Juliet put her hand on the knob, expecting it to be locked, but instead it turned without any resistance. "Wait, his door is unlocked?" Juliet pushed the door open, the hinges creaking as it moved.

There, just as we had found Sheringham, Chris was lying in the middle of his room.

"Huh? Chris… No… He can't be…"

While Juliet was still too shocked to enter the room, Wǔ walked in and immediately checked the body. "He's definitely gone. His body's already cold… If I had to guess, I'd say he died sometime around midnight, but that's the best I can do on my own." His tone of voice was neither angry nor sad, plainly stating what he observed. Afterwards, he got up and moved out of the room to get Hawthorne.



"Well Doc, what're your thoughts?" Wǔ ask Hawthorne, having just finished looking over the corpse.

"I just did a quick autopsy. I didn't see any major injuries, but I did find three small wounds. Take a look at the back of his right hand, if you will."

I did as he asked, and on his right hand I found something that I certainly would have overlooked if he hadn't told me.

"It's likely a puncture wound made by a needle. If the killer used a poison like, say, wolfsbane, it would only take a single prick to paralyze the victim. This other red spot on his hand is likely a second needle prick just to be certain he didn't survive. At this point, I can't say what kind of poison was used, but if two small wounds were enough to kill him, it must have been very strong stuff."

"I only see two wounds, though, right?" Juliet asked, her voice tense. She's likely still reeling from Chris's death.

"Oh, I don't believe it's directly connected to his death. Take another look at the tip of his index finger."

Juliet and I peeked over to the other side of his body together. "He's bleeding…? Do you think this is the killer's doing too?"

"No, it would seem he bit his finger himself, so as to use his blood to write a message on the floor." Surely enough, there was some sort of writing on the floor next to his left hand. Chris's death had so shocked us that we hadn't even noticed it.

"…I think it says… 'mor', right?"

"That's what it looks like to me too, though I don't know what it could mean."

"Well, 'mort' is French for 'death'… but I can't imagine why he would write that while he was dying."

Looking to Wǔ to see if he had any ideas, I saw a glint in his eyes. "Hm… 'mor'… I wonder if…"

"What is it, Wǔ?" Juliet asks curiously, hearing him suddenly speak after being silent for so long.

"Nothing. Just thinking out loud." Wǔ simply deflected away. "Chris can hold his own in a fight. Chris can hold his own in a fight. He'd never let someone else get the better of him that easily."

"That assumes this was a fight. What if he merely shook the killer's hand? If our culprit had palmed a poisoned needle or the like, a simple handshake could be fatal." As Hawthorne pointed out earlier, there were no signs of a struggle. His theory that he was taken by surprise is the most likely.

"Um, Wǔ? It might be kind of rude of me to ask this, but…" Juliet puts forth timidly.

"What is it? Go ahead, I won't be offended."

"Well… whoever killed Chris must have been someone he knew well enough to let his guard down, right? On top of that, someone experienced enough to kill cleanly and quietly. You're… the first one who comes to mind…" A bold claim, even if I was certain it was true, I'd be too scared to ask like this.

In response, Wǔ laughed loudly. "Ahh, now I gotcha. You're not wrong. Well, let me show you something else, then." As soon as he finished his sentence, Wǔ disappeared from sight completely. Looking around, I saw that he had reappeared behind Juliet, leaning against the wall. No matter how much I thought about how he could've done it, it seemed impossible unless he somehow broke the laws of physics. "Gotta be able to move this fast if you wanna make it in this industry. Guests aren't gonna serve themselves, after all."

"If you can do that, what can't you do!?"11

"It's true, there's pretty much nothing I can't do! I probably shouldn't say this in front of guests, but if I wanted to, I could kill everyone here in about the time it'd take you to snap your fingers."

"Oh my…" Hawthorne let out a small exasperation and backed away.

Wǔ looked a little bit distraught. "Don't worry, I wouldn't actually do that. I gave up the assassination business a long time ago. But I'll certainly say this much: I didn't kill Chris. If I was gonna kill him, I wouldn't have done it like this. Giving him time to write a message is an amateur move." Wǔ was also the one who asked us to investigate the first murder, too…

"Good point… I believe you, Wǔ."

"I appreciate that, Ms. Juliet," Wǔ replied, bowing deeply. When he came back up from his bow, his gaze was locked on Chris's corpse. Looks like he noticed something when he got closer to it. "…Huh, looks like Chris left another message. Take a look at this." Reaching down, he pulled an antique silver pocket watch out from under the body.

"Huh, it looks pretty old."

"It is. Sis gave it to him. He polished it every day, always making sure it was in good working order."

"It's stopped at 11:25, though, and the glass is cracked. It looks like it's broken."

"Right. Chris took really good care of it, so there's no chance of it just having randomly broken last night. Especially since it was built to last. I'd bet anything he broke it himself, on purpose." Holding the pocket watch, Wǔ frowned for a moment. He's probably thinking about how sentimental it was to Chris, and that he had to smash it with his own two hands.

"Maybe he broke it to tell whoever found him what time he met the killer?"

"I think you're right on the money, Lady Juliet."

"So, that would mean he met with the killer in this room a little before 11:25 last night?"

"That'd be my guess. If the killer had killed him somewhere else and moved his body here, I'd have noticed that happening."

Looks like everyone's alibis are going to be important from here on out, since we can use them to suss out the killer…

"Hmm, I know there was a poker table running last night, so maybe if we could figure out who was playing it could narrow down the suspects."

"Then, for my part, I'll tell you that Aaron, Adamska, Ann and I were the ones playing poker last night. We started around ten o'clock and kept going until about three in the morning. We did take a few short breaks, but nobody left the room for long."

"It was a damn good game. I stuck around to watch until midnight myself. I haven't seen Sis that fired up in a long time." As long as they can all confirm each other's alibis, then they can be safely ruled out.

"I was in my room with my sister around that time last night. Does that count, even though we're family?"

"Counts in my book. And I'm not just saying that because you believed me when I said I didn't kill Chris. You really seem to be telling the truth." Then we can rule out Harriet as well for now. We can always double check with her later, too.

"Oh, come to think of it, you've got an alibi for that time of night too, Rikka. You were already completely passed out."

I couldn't help but scratch my head at that. …He's not the type to peep on me, is he?

"Hey, hey, don't give me that look. Our poker game was in the room next to yours. Hard to not hear you snoring." …Oh, that's embarrassing… Whether it's tossing and turning, snoring or grinding my teeth, I'd rather not have people hear that. But I guess I should be happy about it for now. "I'll leave the rest of the alibi stuff up to you, Rikka. You're the detective now, right? I hate thinking up alibis and that sort of thing."

"You do?"

At Juliet's reaction, Wǔ looked a bit sad, the first time I've ever seen him like that. "I know I said there's nothing I can't do, but that's not strictly true. I'm useless with riddles. All the things I can do, and none of it's gonna help Chris now… Please, Rikka, you've gotta find whoever did this to him." I can't just say no to such a heartfelt plea like that. "…Anyway, enough chit-chat. We should round everyone up and tell them what happened."

"…By the time we got to Chris's room, it was already too late."

"Oh no! Poor Chris…" Eva covered her face at Juliet's explanation. She may look like she's grieving, but as of now she's a relatively plausible suspect. Since the Violet sisters and the poker table have established alibis, there's not actually that many people left it could possibly be. I need to check with the rest before false alibis start being made…

"Where's Ann? I don't see her anywhere."

"Sis is carrying Chris down to the basement, which is serving as our mortuary for now, I guess. She said she wanted to at least do that much for him herself."

Aaron gave a deep sigh. "Then… Chris really is dead. And just when I'd named him my successor… What terrible timing," he said as he looked directly at Dorothy.

"Why are you looking at me like that…? Do you really think I'm the one who killed him? W-well I didn't. I was putting Laurie to bed. You have to believe me!" If that's true, then Dorothy and Laurie will have their alibi, leaving the only two suspects as Eva and Cain… Will such a simple process of elimination really lead us to the truth?

"Please calm down, Ms. Dorothy. As it turns out, Chris managed to write down 'mor' right before he died. He didn't get to finish his message, but it still seems more likely that it's a clue as to who killed him. And there is someone whose name starts with 'mor' here, isn't there?"

Harriet, shocked, spoke the name that everyone had in their mind, "'mor'? You don't mean… Morris!?"

"I don't see how it could be anyone else."

Everyone in the room's eyes collectively moved to Aaron, the father of the two.

"…So you're saying Morris killed Chris? Is that it?"

"I'm just saying it's possible. He might still be hiding outside somewhere."

"Hahahahahahahahahah!" Aaron suddenly started boisterously laughing. An unhinged laugh that uneased everyone in the room.

"Um, I hope I haven't offended you, sir."

"Not at all. It's the best news I've heard since we left on this trip." Aaron cut off his laughter to reply with a smile on his face. His actions and response were as incomprehensible as they were frightening. "As long as Morris is alive, the Goldie family still has a bright future. Are you listening, Morris? Come out now, and I'll hire you the best lawyer money can buy."

Dorothy looked at Aaron, worried. It was obvious to anyone watching that he was overwhelmed to the point of breaking.

"At any rate, we're going to start running things around here to ensure there aren't any more mistakes. That doesn't mean we're going to start locking you up in your rooms or anything, but if you want to stay alive, I'm going to ask that you follow our instructions as much as possible."

"I'm sure that once I told them that, most'll probably stay cooped up in their rooms anyway. Why don't you go around and gather some info alone while you won't be bothered, Rikka?" After we had adjourned, Wǔ slid up to me to say this as Juliet left to touch up her makeup. But… alone? I tilted my head to the side, and Wǔ immediately follows up as if reading my mind, "Well, I figured there's probably some clues you won't be able to get people to admit if Juliet's with you. I'll keep her protected, so don't worry and go ahead."

Regardless of whether the theory of Morris's involvement is true, I still need to ask Eva about her alibi, and not having Juliet there would mean she wouldn't have anyone else to rely on. Wǔ's got a point, asking her now before Juliet comes back to come with me is probably my best option.

"Good luck out there, gumshoe."

As I was walking down the hallway to find her, I conveniently bumped into Eva, clad in a bikini. But her swimsuit… it's frankly too much, I can't help but get flustered looking at it.

While I was trying to figure out how to approach her while in this outfit, she saw me before I could act. "Oh, hello Rikka."

Too late to run now. I greeted her with a bow.

"Oh, since we came all the way to this lovely resort, I wanted to go out for a little swim." She must have noticed me trying to avert my gaze, and explained why she's dressed like this. "I doubt Wǔ will approve, though, so I don't know what I'm going to do…" I suppose that's true, he can't watch both the Kogetsukan and the beach at the same time— Wait, stop thinking about that. I've gotta stay on track and get her alibi. Even if I can't deduce anything on my own, any information I get I can bring back to Holmes and the others in Chaldea.

In my notepad I was carrying, I wrote 'Did anything unusual happen around bedtime last night?' under a page titled 'Mrs. Violet' and held it up to her.

"Mrs. Violet? Well that's a strange question… No, Mother turned in early last night. I think it must have been around ten… maybe eleven…? I'm sorry, I don't remember the exact time."

That would mean Eva went to sleep before the incident. Since this alibi is self-reported, I'll just note it down and hold off on crossing her out until I can corroborate it.

"Oh! I just had a lovely idea. We could all go for a swim! That way, Wǔ can still keep an eye on us!" Well, at the very least she doesn't seem to think she's a suspect at all… but

it's hard to tell if that's genuine or a façade. "Give me a moment, I'll go suggest it to Wǔ right now. I hope you can join us, Rikka," Eva said before leaving, her voluptuous body swaying as she stepped.

After seeing Eva off, I continued my search around the Kogetsukan, and came across an unlikely pair talking.

"…I'm glad we could come to an agreement, Adamska."

"Likewise. I too would be tremendously grateful for such a resolution. Thank you for coming to me with this."

"Great! I'll see you soon," Dorothy said, leaving reassured.

While thinking about which to speak to first, Adamska strode up to me. Oh well, let's see what Adamska can tell us. "Ah, it's you. I'd like to thank you for being such a good friend to Juliet, and I hope you keep taking good care of her." He carried himself softly, but I seemed to sense a slight bit of hostility.

It's not like I have really hate him though, and I never felt this hostility when I was with Juliet. Does he have his guard up now that I'm alone with him? I knew that if I called him out on it, he'd probably get angry, so I just sort of stared at him instead.

Unfortunately, that too, seemed to upset him. "…You must think I'm a terrible excuse for a father, offering up my own daughter in a political marriage."

I shook my head vaguely in response. It's true that I do sort of think less of him because of that, but I wasn't insane enough to just outright nod in response to him.

"It's okay. It's the truth. And while we're on the subject, I'll admit I'm a terrible leader, too. I'm a coward." Is this how Adamska really sees himself? "I saw that if I didn't do something, the Violet family would have no future whatsoever. If we didn't suffer heavy losses in an all-out war with the Goldie family, we would only end up falling prey to a powerful enemy from elsewhere. That's why I came to the conclusion that an alliance with the Goldie family was our only option for survival." Perhaps the fact that he's a coward was what let him know which way the wind was blowing.

"I never had anything going for me besides my family name. I was never cut out for this world. I was just lucky enough to receive an offer for an arranged marriage with the Violet family's daughter. I was intoxicated by her beauty at first sight, and it wasn't long until we were married." I'm reminded of my run-in with Eva earlier. I can only imagine what the real Eva looks like, but she must be extremely beautiful.

"…I thought there was nothing I couldn't do as long as it would make her happy. That was what let me do my best at a job that was frankly beyond me for the next twenty years. But now, I'm the head of the whole Violet family. I have to think about what's best for my children, and for my subordinates. My wife was against the idea, but for once, I went against her wishes. Do you understand how that must have felt, Rikka!?" Adamska grabbed my shoulders, almost shouting.

Quickly after, he pulled away, as if noticing something. “Forgive me… Perhaps I misjudged you,” he apologizes, taking his hands off my shoulders. “Just between us, I never liked Morris. Chris either, honestly. Do you think that any father could truly be happy while giving away his daughter to some stranger?” Ah, so is that why he was being hostile? I suppose that makes sense, and if there’s anyone who he could confide this in, it’s definitely Rikka Fujimahr. “But you, Rikka… I like you. Juliet always seems to have so much fun when you’re together. I can’t express how happy I would be if you two became a couple.” I wondered if he was being truthful after that outburst, but his face showed nothing but cheer.

“As it turns out, Dorothy just came to me with an interesting proposition. If Aaron agrees to it, solve all our problems… But then, I guess there isn’t much point in telling you about this. Just forget I said anything. The point is, if all goes well, Juliet will be free. I’m sure you want that just as much as I do.”

It’d be great if Juliet somehow wasn’t forced into marriage, but if the merger were to fall through it’d only be a matter of time before the two families would be at each other’s throats again. Could there really be such a perfect solution to all this that fixed both?

“Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to think of a way to convince Aaron. Treat my daughter well, Rikka.” Adamska gave me a gentle smile before taking his leave.

What could Dorothy’s proposition possibly be? Once I started thinking about it, I couldn’t think about anything else. Even the fact that Cain didn’t have an alibi slipped out of my mind. But no matter how much I thought, no answer that could solve every problem arose.

As I was walking and thinking, I ran into Juliet and Wǔ near the kitchen.

“There you are! Where have you been all this time?”

Juliet seemed annoyed, so I immediately gave an apologetic bow. Apparently Wǔ never explained to her that I was investigating alone.

“Ms. Juliet does a convincing job of playing stoic, but she was really worried about you.”

“You didn’t need to tell him that!” Juliet yelled back, kicking Wǔ in his shin.

It looked like she hit him pretty hard, but he shrugged it off. “Heheh, sorry. Oh yeah, now that you’re both here, Ms. Eva suggested we all go to the beach after we’ve had lunch.” Either Eva was really persuasive, or Wǔ was a plan of his own… either way, I never expected us to be actually going to the beach.

“I guess we could use a breather, given the circumstances, even if we don’t swim.” Seems like she’s trying to slyly tell me not to. Luckily, I wasn’t planning on swimming anyway.

“It’ll be good to get out and get some sun, at least. Lemme go ahead and whip something up for lunch.”

Suddenly, I let out a big sigh. I'm not sure if it's because I'm relieved, or just the lack of sleep. Slipping back into Chaldea to recap the rest doesn't seem like a bad idea, though.

"Hey, you're looking kind of drowsy. Go ahead and catch some Z's if you want. I'll make sure to wake you up. The sofa's right there waiting for you."

"We can watch the sofa from the kitchen, too, so don't worry."

Saved by the two of them being able to read my mood, I graciously accepted their offer to take a nap.

Immediately after I awoke again, I filled in my three companions about Chris's death.

"Chris too? That's awful…" Mash seemed like Chris's death had greatly impacted her, despite never even meeting him.

The other two, however, didn't show any particular emotion towards the event. Holmes, specifically, was just looking up at the ceiling for no discernable reason.

"What is it, Holmes?"

Holmes's gaze tracked down to me, followed by him shaking his head slowly. "…Oh, it's nothing of import. I was just thinking about what these alibis could mean."

"Oh do stop beating around the bush, would you? If you don't know the answer, just say so."

Rather than answering to the provocation, Holmes simply turned his gaze back up to the ceiling.

"Well, at least I've found a way to get you to pipe down. By the way, is this Wǔ person foreign?"

"Come to think of it, I think one of the commandments in Knox's Decalogue was 'No mysterious foreigner from the East must figure into the story'… Does that have anything to do with this case?"

At Mash's question, Holmes seemed finally ready to jump into the discussion. "This may be hard for you two to believe, having grown up in this modern era, but during the golden age of detective fiction, some people believed quite fervently that all people of the East held mysterious powers."

"I have no way of knowing what Knox may have truly meant by that maxim, but, thinking conventionally, I would think it means to not rely on beings with unknown abilities, foreign or otherwise, to connect your story's dots."

"In that sense, we can take Wǔ at his word and strike him from the list of suspects. No bland, uninspired case where just about anything goes would ever fall into the lap of a detective such as myself!" If Wǔ really was the culprit, I don't think anyone would be able to do anything about it, either.

"That's true… A mystery relying on cheap tricks and bizarre gimmicks isn't really something anyone would enjoy solving, is it?"

"Though I will say that I had a number of foreign connections, including one with a certain Fù Manchu himself!" Is this really something you should be bragging about right now?

"Could you brag about your scantly believable, filthy as the Thames connections another time?" Holmes said coldly, but Moriarty just laughed it off, caring not what his rival thinks. "At any rate, I'd like to focus on Chris's dying message."

"You mean the 'mor' he wrote in his own blood?"

"Indeed. I can certainly understand wishing to leave behind an accusation of one's killer once death is certain. But we do not yet have enough information to be certain that 'Morris' is what he meant to write. Though it is only six letters, that may have been too much to write out while he was at death's door."

"I guess so… I know if I was a murder victim, I might try to write some hint as to the killer's identity. Does that mean you've already figured out what the message really means then, Holmes?"

"I have a hypothesis, but there would be little point in voicing it now."

Moriarty looked at Holmes with a Cheshire Cat-like smile. "Would that be because you lack confidence in it? Or because what you suspect still lies ahead?"

"Interpret that however you like. I merely would like to avoid coloring our impressions before we have all the data we need to resolve this case. My job is to reveal the truth, after all, so where possible, I like to deal strictly in facts. Besides, the only one who truly needs to know how valid my deductions are at any given point in time is myself."

Moriarty let out a "Hohoh?" while smiling. Unlike his smile before, this one seems to be genuine, one that we rarely see. It's hard for me to get a read on his true intentions, but regardless, it's clear Holmes is completely agitated by him.

"There, you see? This is exactly why I can't stand detectives. You care more about how you plan to solve this case than you do the well-being of the people fearing for their lives! I daresay if anyone here is a coldhearted villain, it is you, not I."

"Need I remind you, Professor, I was never the architect of any mysteries of my own, particularly not any involving murder." Sparks fly between the world's greatest detective and the king of crime. Watching this would be some people's wildest dream, but I'm not really in a position to be able to enjoy the show.

"Um… There's actually one other thing I've been wondering about… What could Dorothy have proposed to Adamska?"

Holmes broke his gaze away from Moriarty and smiled at Mash. "Oh, that? That mystery is not nearly so difficult. One simply need consider the difficult position Dorothy is in and her tempestuous nature to arrive at the answer. Though, of course, it will mean little if Aaron refuses to go along…" As I listened along to Holmes's explanation, I felt my drowsiness creeping up on me, faster than ever before. "Ah, it would seem we are once more out of time. Very well, one last word of advice. Now that Chris is dead, the game is well and truly afoot. Do not let your guard down."

Taking Holmes's words into my heart, I let go of my consciousness.

The salty smell of the sea hits my nose and warmth comes over my body before I even awaken. Opening my eyes, the beach was indeed before me, and an umbrella was above shading me. The heat immediately knocked any lingering sleepiness out of me, even with the umbrella taking the edge off of it.

"It's about time you woke up. You missed lunch entirely, you know that?" Juliet turns her head down to me, our eyes meeting. Realizing now that my head has been resting in Juliet's lap, I roll over in a panic. I went to nap before 11, so I must have slept for about two or three hours. It felt a bit weird, but maybe it's just a case of time flowing differently here.

"You looked so peaceful that I didn't want to wake you, so I just carried you to the beach here myself." Wǔ has a mischievous grin on his face. Knowing why, my face went hot from blushing. Wǔ didn't say anything more about it, though, probably because Rikka is one of his guests.

"I've never seen anyone sleep so soundly before… Must have been nice."

"I dunno, I'd say that the others napping with full bellies are giving Rikka a run for his money. Anyway, you might've missed lunch, but I kept some leftover sandwiches for you if you'd like." Looking around, I see Aaron and Hawthorne also sleeping under beach umbrellas. Harriet is nearby too, sitting and looking out at the ocean.

"Everyone wanted to just relax, I guess. Even big scary Wǔ wanted to get some beach time," Juliet teased, but Wǔ was able to keep a straight face.

"Well, yeah, being able to relax is nice, but it's also a good way to stay safe. Nowhere to hide, so you can see a threat coming from a mile away. And on top of that, this warm weather pretty much ensures that people dress lightly, which makes it real easy to tell if they're carrying a weapon. Of course, you could still probably hide a tiny, poison-tipped needle." Following where Wǔ was looking, I saw Eva and Dorothy on the beach, both in their swimsuits. "Though I honestly didn't expect everyone to actually change into their swimsuits, so I guess I do get to relax a little, after all."

"Yeah, but maybe some people should dress more their age. Take a page from Dr. Hawthorne's book…" Who exactly is Juliet talking about, I wonder?

As I was pondering that, Eva, playing at the water's edge, noticed us. "Come on and join us, Juliet! The water's great!" Seeing her waving at us with water dripping from her body made me really glad that this was a private beach. I can't imagine if we were at a public one.

"Hey, just how old do you think I am? It's been ages since I just splashed around like that." As Juliet yelled this to her, Eva started to approach us, wearing a face like we were both squarely in her sights to tease.

"Oh, is that so? Because it looks to me like you're just embarrassed about wearing your swimsuit in front of Rikka."

"Oh, shut up and leave me alone!" Juliet blushes bright red as she shoos Eva away.

Harriet watched the two bicker, amused. “I know I’m not about to let the sun damage my skin. I’ll just stay under this umbrella and enjoy a nice little nap myself.”

“You’re going to take a nap? Even though someone might be trying to kill us?”

“Don’t worry, you’ll be fine with me here,” Adamska cut in, apparently having been there for the whole conversation.

Seeing Juliet looking shocked, I glanced over to him only to be greeted to a low-angle view of his tight speedo.

“I’ll keep the whole family safe.” Looking closely, Adamska is wet as well. Was he watching over Eva while she was in the water?

“Well, I wonder about that, Daddy…”

Harriet gave a snicker. “You never were much help, were you, Daddy?”

“Come on, you two! Just because it’s true doesn’t mean you have to say it…” Adamska looked depressed, his moment now ruined. I guess stuff like this is what helped give him his complex.

“By the way, Rikka, are you not planning on swimming?”

“Rikka’s just going to be sunbathing with me!” Juliet snapped, sending Eva back to the surf sadly.

“Twins sure are something, huh?” Wǔ lets out, having been silently watching the exchange.

“Well, I know we’re technically twins, but we’re actually fraternal. I don’t see much resemblance myself.”

“Oh, did I say that out loud? I didn’t mean it negatively or anything. I’m an only child, so it’s interesting for me to see the kind of connection you guys have.” Wǔ’s not wrong, I think it’s neat too. While their mother Eva is out swimming, both Juliet and Harriet are firmly planted under their umbrellas. The two twins are more alike than maybe she realizes.

“Personality-wise, I think she takes after Mother. They’re both really free-spirited… I’m honestly kind of jealous.”

“And you get your serious side from me.”

“Sure, Daddy. Let’s just leave it at that.” Well, whatever their situation may be, it’s nice that they’re still all close like this.

Curious at what the Goldies were up to, I turned to take a look at them.

“Aren’t you going for a swim, Laurie? You’ve been getting your swimsuit all sandy sitting on the beach for so long.”

“That’s okay. It’s more fun playing with Cain.”

“Hehehehe. Hey Laurie, I found some crabs over theeere!”

“Crabs! Be right there!”

“…All right. Just be careful. I’ll be right here if you need me,” Dorothy gently reminds her daughter as she’s about to take off in a run.

“Now that I think of it, did you ever ask Dorothy about her alibi, Rikka?”

I shake my head. She announced it to the whole room earlier, but I never had the chance to talk to her about it directly.

Juliet then quickly approached Dorothy and cut to the chase, "Um… Dorothy? Please don't take this the wrong way. You see, we've been asking everyone this… What were you doing last night?"

"Oh, me? I put Laurie to bed around ten. I fell asleep beside her shortly after and we didn't wake up till morning," Dorothy calmly replied, without a trace of any animosity despite knowing she was currently a suspect. "Ask Laurie if you'd like, but I don't think she'll have much to say, since she fell asleep before me…"

"Got it. Thank you."

"You're quite welcome," responding with a smile, Dorothy gets ready to head into the sea. "Ahh, what a lovely day. I had no idea the beach was so much fun! I think I'll go for a swim myself."

Watching Dorothy run towards the water, Juliet and I made our way back to the umbrellas where the others were waiting.

"Dorothy's sure in a good mood, isn't she?"

Harriet is already sound asleep. Perhaps anxiety was getting the better of her at night.

"Of course. She's the second wife," Adamska answered Juliet. "With Morris missing, and Chris dead, Laurie is all set to inherit control of the Goldie family. Which means her own position in the family is all but secured, being Laurie's mother." Yeah, even if there's other illegitimate children of Aaron, if they don't show up before Laurie is officially named the successor, it'll be too late.

"I see. That makes sense. She certainly looked like she was at a loss for words when Aaron revealed that Chris was his son— Wait. You're not saying Dorothy killed Chris, are you, Daddy?"

Adamska shrugged. "No, I'm not saying that. She just would seem to have a good motive is all."

"Um…" Dorothy suddenly joined the conversation.

Not expecting the woman he was just speaking of to show up, Adamska nearly jumped out of his skin. "D-Dorothy?"

"I'm sorry, did I scare you?"

"No no, you just startled me a bit. Is there something I can do for you, Dorothy?" Never forgetting that he must still act as the Violet family head, no matter what position he's put in… I really am starting to like Adamska.

"Have you seen Laurie anywhere? I think she ran off when I wasn't looking."

Juliet scans around the area. "Come to think of it, I don't see Cain anywhere either. I wonder where they've gotten to."

"Oh, I hope they weren't so fascinated with the crabs that they got caught in an undertow…"

"I'll help you look for them. I'm worried about Cain, too." Juliet sits up in her seat.

"That would be great. Thank you, Juliet."

"I'll come along too. It'll be safer that way." Seeing Adamska get up, I did as well, but Juliet shook her head at us.

"It's ok, Daddy, they're kids. They can't have gone that far, and we can always call for help if something happens. You stay here and keep an eye on everyone else."

"…All right."

"Rikka, stay here too. And don't you go dying on me."

Accepting her orders, I sat back down and waited with Adamska and the others.

Ten minutes passed since the two left, with Eva bored and Adamska not leaving Harriet's side. Hopefully we can make it to the end of this trip without anyone else going missing, or worse…

"…I finally have you all to myself."

Before I could realize it, Eva had snuggled up next to me. …Isn't this a bit much!? I look to Adamska to save me, but he's not paying attention, and Eva doesn't seem to mind.

"Oh, don't worry about that. Nobody's watching, and it's not like I'm going to cook you up and eat you."

Not knowing what to do, I just nod along with her.

"I've been wondering ever since you came along with us… What exactly are you and Juliet? Friends? Or are you maybe dating?"

I smile ambiguously, not wanting to confirm either.

"You know I can't take that for an answer. There's no need to try and hide your true feelings now. Even if Morris does show up again, I'm pretty sure their engagement is off the table." Eva scoffs, "Honestly, everyone here is so stubborn! Especially Juliet. For all the fuss she made about saying she would marry him because she's the eldest, I don't think she ever actually meant it." I can see what she means. Morris aside, she seemed like she didn't want to marry Chris either, and he was almost perfect.

"Still that's what makes Juliet so special. She's earnest, responsible, and sensitive all at once. That's why I want her to be happy. As long as she truly loves her partner, it doesn't matter what sort of family they're from or what their gender is." What a progressive way of thinking for someone dressed in such a lewd bikini, teasing me like this…

"Mmm, but… if you're interested, I'd be happy to entertain you myself." Eva put her hand on my chest, leaning in closer. "Oh…?"

This could be bad…

"Aaaaaah!"

Juliet and Dorothy's screams reach our ears from out in the distance. I immediately get up from my seat, happy to be out of my previous situation.

"Hmph, and just as things were getting interesting… Juliet always did have impeccably bad timing." Eva let out a long sigh that seemed like it took all the air in her

lungs. “All right, go on then. You should at least get there first and show her what you’re made of, right?”

I ran onto the beach in the directions of the screams, eventually finding Juliet and Dorothy. They didn’t look injured, but were instead frozen in shock.

“Rikka!” Seeing me, Juliet suddenly threw her arms around me. Still not knowing whether I should put my arms around her shoulders or not, I kept my reaction reserved.

“O-over there…”

On the beach just a short distance away sat what looked like a mannequin that had washed up on the beach. But upon closer inspection, the texture of its skin was unmistakably that of a human corpse, not plastic. The clothes it’s wearing… Is that…?

“Why did you guys scream like that? Did something happen, Mommy?” an innocent voice asks. Looking in the direction it came from, I see Laurie and Cain standing there.

Dorothy quickly crouched down and embraced Laurie. “Oh Laurie, where were you? You had me so worried…”

Seeing how her mother was acting, Laurie just stood still and said nothing. However, there is another who couldn’t read the room…

“Did you find a big crab or something? Did ya? Did ya? Hehehehe!” Cain jumps forward and tries to go toward the body.

“Stop, Cain! Don’t go over that way!”

Cain dodges past Juliet’s arm trying to grab him and bounds towards the water. Thankfully, he’s stopped by the sudden appearance of Wǔ.

“Okay, that’s far enough. Trust me, you don’t want to get too close. Between the blond hair and that outfit, I’d lay odds that’s Morris’s body.” So Morris really was dead, too… “All kinds of stuff drifts in on the ocean currents around here. From the look of him, he must have been floating out at sea for a while. I couldn’t stop you ladies from getting a peek, but I’ll be damned if I’m gonna let anyone else see this.”

“We still need to make sure it’s him first…” Juliet refutes, still trembling.

However, Wǔ keeps his calm composure. “…Look, I didn’t want to have to say this, but… When fish come across a dead body, usually they start eating the softest parts first. Specifically, the eyes and lips. If you still wanna take a look knowing that, be my guest.”

Without those, it’s almost impossible to identify any more than what we’ve already done. There’s no point in stomaching a gruesome sight like that for nothing. Looking at Juliet’s face, now gone blue, she seemed to feel the same.

“Oh, Morris…” Dorothy began to cry wistfully as she called out her son’s name. Even if she didn’t give birth to him herself, she must have still seen him as her son all the same. Despite how we met, I’m sure now that Dorothy is a truly kindhearted person.

Wǔ gently places a handkerchief in Dorothy’s hands, saying to the group, “I’m sorry to ask, but would you all mind going back to the mansion together? Oh, and would you also wake Dr. Hawthorne up and send him here?”

The survivors were all gathered in the reception room. An hour had already passed since the discovery of the corpse, and the jovial air that the families had once had at the sea was now gone, with everyone back in their regular clothes.

"I believe the cause of death to be drowning," Hawthorne begins explaining, having completed his autopsy, "but the body also had some rather ugly bruises. My guess is that he was pushed into the ocean from somewhere high up. Is there anywhere on this island where that might have been done?"

"There's a cliff at the northern edge of the island. If that's where he was pushed in, it'd explain how he washed up with the tide."

Hawthorne gives Wǔ's explanation a nod of agreement. "And… It's hard to say precisely, but given the body's hair color, build, and other physical features, it was indeed most likely Morris."

Dorothy lays her face in her hands. She was probably hoping for some small sign that Morris might somehow still be alive out there.

Hawthorne hastily added on, "But with so little of his face to confirm his identity, I can't be certain."

Adamska also offered some words of comfort to her, "That means Morris could have just gotten some other dead body and done it up to look like himself… Hmm. If so, then we all should still be on our guard."

"…That's enough." The words out of Aaron's mouth were quiet, but biting.

"Honey?"

"Morris had no idea we were coming to this mansion. And where could he have possibly gotten a lookalike corpse?"

"I…" Adamska clammed up under the pressure, perplexed as to how his words could have hurt Aaron like this.

"The last shred of hope I was clinging to is gone. My son, Morris Goldie, is dead. With Chris gone as well, the only one left to succeed me is Laurie. That is why I propose this, Adamska, having spoken with my wife. What do you say to an engagement between my Laurie and your Cain?"

"…I was hoping you'd say that, Aaron. That sounds like an excellent idea to me."

Juliet turns to Adamska after hearing his reply, anger beginning to well up in her. "Slow down! Laurie's still just a child, and there's no way Cain can take over for the family…"

As Adamska was about to respond to his daughter, Aaron spoke over him, "Don't be so old-fashioned. We wouldn't have the two of them get married right this instant. The important thing is that we promise to have them marry in the future. You're the Violet family's eldest daughter. You should know as well as any of us what will happen if our alliance falls through."

"I… Well, yes, but—"

"Not to mention that if all we bring back is the news of Morris's death, there will be rumors that the Violet family assassinated him, leading to all-out war. This is the only option we have to avoid such a catastrophe."

"What about the children, Mr. Goldie? Don't they get a say in this?" Hawthorne tags in for Juliet, offering himself as another voice of reason.

Laurie, however, answers unfazed, "I don't mind marrying Cain."

"You say that now, but you're still so little…" Hawthorne quietly replied, dismayed.

"Don't worry, Dr. Hawthorne, we can reconsider what to do about the engagement once Laurie has come of age. Even if it changes later, the silver lining is that our alliance will last at least a few years with this."

"I'm fine with that. I don't really get what's going on, but I'm fine with that!"

"I'm glad to see you understand. …If only you had a better head on your shoulders." Despite Aaron's brazen words, Cain didn't seem to mind at all. "All right then, we'll say that Morris died in an unfortunate accident. Please, don't let my son's death be in vain."

Ann doubled Aaron's sentiment, "Speaking only for myself, I don't want to see Chris's death be for nothing either. So long as we all agree to keep the truth secret, I am willing to go with this version of events."

"Then it's settled." Adamska approached Aaron with a hand extended, to which Aaron firmly squeezed it in response.

"Yesterday's bitter enemy is today's dependable friend. I'm glad to count you among mine."

With their third agreement set in place, the time between then and the end of our dinner flew by. Despite the deaths, both families seemed amiable around the table, no doubt proud of themselves for being able to come to this result. The fact that we were all set to leave this place tomorrow likely contributed, as well.

In sharp contrast to the rest of them, Juliet was in a melancholic sulk the whole time. Thinking back on it, I don't remember seeing Juliet eat much at all, nor did I see her sipping wine alongside Eva and Harriet. I wonder if she still has some concerns lingering in the back of her head…

"Oh, are you worried about me?"

My unintentional habit of letting my emotions show on my face seemed to have been acting up again. When I quietly gave her a nod, Juliet mouthed 'Thanks' back to me, seeming to be happier now.

"You know, Rikka—"

"Ah, it's you two!" Just as Juliet was about to start, Aaron interrupted. His face was beet red, and his gait wobbly. As Aaron made his way over to us, I could see him starting to trip up, an "Oh hell…" being barely audible from his mouth.

Getting up from my chair, I was narrowly able to catch him as he lost his balance, preventing him from tumblng to the ground.

"Ah, my hero! Sorry about that." Aaron adjusts his jacket and gives a deep bow to us. Catching him combined with his gracious demeanor afterwards made my heart flutter a bit, despite not having any feelings for him. If he's this effective at this age, I can't imagine how many hearts he broke when he was younger. "Ahem, as I was about to say… Excellent timing! I was just about to go search for a fresh bottle to uncork. Care to join?"

"You're completely smashed already… Have you no shame?" Juliet wanted nothing to do with Aaron in his current state.

"Do I seem drunk to you? I'm actually at a loss because I can't seem to get drunk… Oh, by the way, I haven't taken you to bed before, have I?"

In that moment, Juliet delivered one of the fiercest glares I've ever seen. "Ugh! You're just as gross as your son!"

"My apologies. I've been with so many women, it's impossible to keep track of them all. I must've confused you with one of my myriad one-night stands." He apologizes, and shockingly doesn't seem offended at all by her comment. This must just be how Aaron is. "I was born with a condition that makes it difficult for me to have children, you see. That gave me an excuse to spread my seed quite a bit when I was still a young man."

"If all you want to do is brag about your conquests, I'll be leaving."

"Oh, yes, sorry about that. I'm truly not trying to pick you two up. I did settle down after Laurie was born. After having a daughter, I came to understand how reprehensible my behavior was."

"…Even if you feel bad about it now, that certainly doesn't change what you did."

"Yes, you're right. Perhaps losing both Morris and Chris in such quick succession is the punishment I deserve…"

Juliet looked aghast at the turn things had taken. Even though she was angry with him, she must have realized that hurting a man who has already lost two sons felt far from good. "I-I didn't mean it that way…"

"Thank you, Juliet… I no longer feel like drinking. I think I'll just go ahead and turn in for the night." Aaron turned and left with firm footing. He sounded like a raving drunkard, but maybe he really was sober tonight.

With Aaron's back leaving our sight, Juliet turned to me. Blushing a bit, she abruptly asked, "…Hey, Rikka? Why don't we go get some night air?"

Juliet and I walked out to the beach together alone. Nobody else but the two of us, with a beautiful full moon illuminating the night sky. I couldn't help but point such a stunning moon out to Juliet as well, outstretching my arm toward it as I grabbed her arm.

"Oh, wow! It's so bright it's almost dazzling." Looking at her take in the glow, Juliet looked even more dazzling.

"You know, I've been so anxious ever since this arranged marriage came up, but too scared to do anything about it…" I knew it, she never wanted to do this, but was still willing

to give up everything for her family… "But having you here, and seeing you get sad or angry on my behalf, has made me feel so much better, Rikka."

Hearing her say that, I couldn't help but point to myself in surprise. I thought she had to be making a joke or something, but she gave me an affirming smile in response.

"…Even after all my other friends left, I still had you. But that's okay, because it turns out you were the only one I needed."

I suddenly think about the person whose body I'm inhabiting right now, Rikka Fujimahr. Even after seeing Juliet's friends cut ties one after another, Rikka still didn't budge in their friendship. I don't know what Rikka's true motive was for that, but if I want to make it through this conversation, I think I'm going to have to use my gut more than my knowledge.

"Even if I had ended up married to Morris, I think I could have handled it, just knowing that you were there for me. The engagement may be over now, but I'm still so grateful to you, for everything. Thank you."

I have to wonder, am I truly qualified to accept her praise on behalf of the true Rikka? While asking myself this, I smiled at Juliet.

"Hey… Can I tell you something else?" Juliet leaned in close, her cheeks dyed red. If we were dating, this would be where I'd pull her in, right? I tentatively placed my hand on her shoulder, and felt her body shaking a bit. Juliet must be mustering up all the courage she has in her little body. In that case, I can't let that go to waste.

I grabbed both her shoulders, put my forehead against hers, and then, and then—… The dreamlike moment started to be snatched away from me, as my consciousness began to fade away.

"Huh? What's wrong?" Juliet was astonished, but my body just isn't strong enough to hold out any longer. "Rikka? Rikka…?"

I jumped to attention immediately as I regained consciousness on the Chaldean side. My heart was racing as I tried to summarize everything to the three waiting for me.

"Hmm, I see… So you conked out just when you and Juliet were having a moment. Of course, it sounds like you and Eva were rather having a moment of your own before circumstances intervened, eh?" Moriarty started trailing off into a mumble before finally looking me in the eyes and asking, "So, tell me honestly. How far did you go with them?"

"T-that's not the point, Professor!" Pouting, Mash looked at me with flushed cheeks. "Those moments on the beach… Were just his way of getting ready for summer! Right, Senpai?" If this keeps up, I'm going to lose control of the conversation…

Just as I thought I was doomed, Holmes came to my aid. "No, this was nothing like that. Remember, this is Rikka Fujimahr's story, you two."

"Oh. Y-yeah, you're right…" Even as she said this, Mash still looked embarrassed, as if imagining something.

"At any rate, it seems these latest developments played out how we expected."

"I concur. Although… A full moon, eh…?"

"H-huh? Why is that interesting?" Holmes and Moriarty both seem to already know what he means, but frustratingly it seems both Mash and I are out of the loop. We should team up and question them…

"I'm afraid that will have to wait, Ms. Kyrielight. First, I need to ask Mr. Fujimaru something. Did you notice or feel anything odd before you passed out?"

"I don't think so… I didn't cough up blood or anything like that."

Moriarty gives me a single, slow nod. “I see… It was most likely a sleeping pill or paralyzing agent, then, not a lethal poison.”

“I believe we can rule out Juliet as a suspect in this case. She would have no need to feign concern about you while you two were alone, after all. Quite the opposite, in fact. That would be the time for her to show her true colors.”

Both Mash and Moriarty were taken aback by Holmes’s reasoning. “Have you no heart, man? Surely we can take Juliet’s feelings at face value.”

Holmes, however, continues with his logic, “I only mean that I would not consider someone’s sex as a factor in determining whether they can be trusted. I must say, though, I never thought to see the day when a criminal extols the virtue of trust…”

“Um… I still don’t understand why Senpai was targeted. Was it also just a spur-of-the-moment decision?” Yeah, I can’t understand why anyone would target me. Rikka should at least be irrelevant to the interests of both the families.

“I expect it is a natural consequence of the investigation.” Moriarty provides me with his theory this time. It’s a bit strange to see him of all people in the position of Holmes’s assistant detective, but reassuring in a sort of twisted way. “The two families may have finalized their alliance by betrothing their children, but the killer’s identity still being a mystery is sure to create tensions. More importantly, the killer will not want to live in constant fear of discovery, so a scapegoat would solve both of those issues nicely. As an outsider, Rikka is the obvious choice. In which case, the killer may mean to kill and frame Rikka for their own crimes.”

“Professor Moriarty! How could you even say that? That’s horrible!” Mash protests with a look of disbelief.

“Please don’t be angry with me. I am merely offering a possibility.”

“I’m inclined to agree with the professor in this instance. If there’s any consolation to be had, it’s that our culprit won’t be attempting anything sufficiently violent that it might easily be seen as foul play. They would need to falsify a note and make the murder appear to be a suicide, or the whole endeavor would be quite pointless. For example, they could strangle him to death and then cover it up by making it seem as though he hanged himself… but an autopsy would spoil that bit of trickery. Then again, if the culprit were the one performing the autopsy, then such a cover-up would be quite easy. Don’t you agree, Doctor?”

“You do understand that Dr. Hawthorne and I are quite separate people, yes?” Moriarty calmly chides Holmes for accusing him of such a thing. “Having said that, I do hope you will not hold it against me if he does turn out to be the killer…”

“The next time you return to that side, be sure to investigate your room for a suicide note. It’s entirely possible that it has already been planted ahead of time.”

All of a sudden, my body was sapped of its strength and my vision went completely black.

"Senpai…?" The only sense I have left is my hearing, and even that is barely functioning. I know soon even that will be gone, too.

"Well now, it seems he's finally reached the point where he simply falls asleep without any premonitory signs whatsoever. Of course, if he's still falling asleep, that must mean Rikka is still alive. At least we can be happy about that. Wouldn't you agree, Detective?"

Whatever Holmes's reply was, it never reached my ears. With a trembling heart, I flipped back onto the other side of the world…

"It seems we'll soon be reaching the climax, my fellows," Holmes said as he placed the unconscious Ritsuka back into bed.

"I still have no idea about what's really going on in this case… But as Senpai's support team, we need to figure out some way to help him crack it. Right, Holmes?"

Holmes glanced at the clock with a pained expression. "My apologies, but there is something I need to take care of immediately. Do hold down the fort while I am gone, will you?"

"Huh? What do you…?"

Holmes turned his back on the stunned Mash. "I fear I truly don't have time to explain right now. Feel free to direct any questions to the professor."

Mash looked to Moriarty, who seemed to be piecing it together. "Hmm. The full moon, eh?"

"Quite so, Professor!" Holmes said briskly before leaving the room.

"All right, tell me, Professor Moriarty. What was Holmes talking about?"

"Hmm, I must admit that solving the plots is not really my forte. I am more in the business of creating them. And my own strong preference makes me disinclined to explain what that crackpot may be thinking… but for you, young Mash, I suppose an exception can be made."

Moriarty begins breaking down his presumptions with a gentle expression, "Holmes and I are both working with the same information this time, so all I needed to do in this case was fit those pieces of the puzzle together. We would naturally both arrive at the same conclusion, unless he were delirious with fever or the like."

"Then, you know where Holmes went, Professor Moriarty?"

Moriarty nodded somewhat reluctantly.

"You both mentioned the full moon… He's not planning to actually go there, is he?"

"No, Mash, don't be silly. Though I imagine Holmes might find the notion amusing. I'll explain about the moon in due time. Unfortunately, young Master Ritsuka was only awake for a short while this time, so we were unable to warn him."

"…That's true. There was something I wanted Senpai to look into as well."

"Oh? And what might that be?"

"Well, nobody's come out and said it, but… it sounded to me like Ann might be Chris's birth mother."

"Yes, that certainly seems likely. One could infer as much from her behavior. I imagine Aaron must have entrusted Chris to his mother after refusing to take him in himself."

"…So then, Ann lost her son, too…" Mash said, sad that her guess seems to be correct. "We have to solve this case quickly, before anyone else dies. Is there anything else, Professor Moriarty?"

"There is indeed: Chris's dying message. Though there may not be much point in bringing it up now. At any rate, assuming this message was indeed meant to point to the killer, we cannot assume he would simply write the killer's name. A defining attribute of the killer would more than suffice. Personally, I believe he meant to write 'mom.'"

"'Mom'? But how would that point to the culprit?"

"It may not be a complete message, but it's also only three letters, making it much easier than writing out a full name. Though it's unfortunate Chris evidently failed to finish writing even that, giving the false impression that it was actually 'mor.'"

"'Mom'… Wait a moment. If Chris was possibly talking about his own mom, does that mean Ann is out to kill Senpai right now…!?"

Regaining my senses of touch and smell, I felt a strange sensation as if my toes rubbing against something, along with an indescribably sweet aroma reaching my nose. As I realized that it was because I was being half-dragged half-carried on someone's back, I jolted awake, instinctually trying to plant my legs onto the ground and stand on my own feet.

"Ah!" Perhaps due to the sudden change in the center of gravity, Juliet, who was carrying Rikka on her back, lost her balance and stumbled forward. "Oh, you're awake now? Thank goodness, I was just about to bring you to Dr. Hawthorne."

Checking my surroundings, I saw that we were back at the entrance to the Kogetsukan. Did she really carry me back here all by herself?

"Welp, I'm completely exhausted. I don't even know where I got the strength to carry you this far. I bet I'm going to be really sore tomorrow."

My only guess is that she was able to rally every last bit of power she had in her when she saw a friend in need… No, more than that. If Juliet went to these lengths, then I'm

absolutely sure Rikka's even more important to Juliet than just a friend, and I have no doubt anymore that it's mutual for Rikka as well.

"I thought about leaving you on the beach and going ahead to call for help, but I couldn't leave you out there at the mercy of the wolves, or the killer…" Juliet said in a shy, yet sweet voice. "Do you think you can walk already?"

I slowly nodded my head, to which Juliet smiled.

"Good. Then…" As she spoke, Juliet circled around behind me before jumping onto my back. I could feel the warmth of her body as it leaned against mine. "Since I'm so tired… would you mind carrying me to my room?"

Accepting her request, I took Juliet back to her room, crouching down to delicately let her off in front of her door. As she went to leave, I felt a pang of regret in the back of my head.

"Hey, Rikka? Have a good night. I can see the bags under your eyes, so get some rest too, okay?"

I gave Juliet a wave goodbye, not putting my hand down until I saw her door close completely and heard the sound of it locking. As long as her door's locked, she should be safe from any intruders.

And now, it's time to start my search. Rushing back to my room, I began to inspect every inch of it. In the drawers, under the bed, behind the mirror, below the pillow—…

A-ha!

Underneath the pillow I found a folded piece of paper, in B5 size, not even Letter. Nervously, I unfold it and read what it says.

Everyone,

You may not have known, but in truth, I was Juliet's boyfriend. We may have only been together for a short time, but Juliet, I truly did love you with all my heart. In a fit of jealousy, it was me who pushed Morris off the cliff, as well as poisoned Chris in his room.

I know what I've done is abhorrent and indefensible, so in order to atone for it, I have taken my own life.

For everything, I'm so, so sorry.

-Rikka Fujimahr

I almost ripped it in half in my hands. Not just because of the corny writing, but because the damn thing could've been thought to be a genuine suicide note if I hadn't found it! If I hadn't been with Juliet down on the beach when I got knocked out, I might even already have been dead by now.

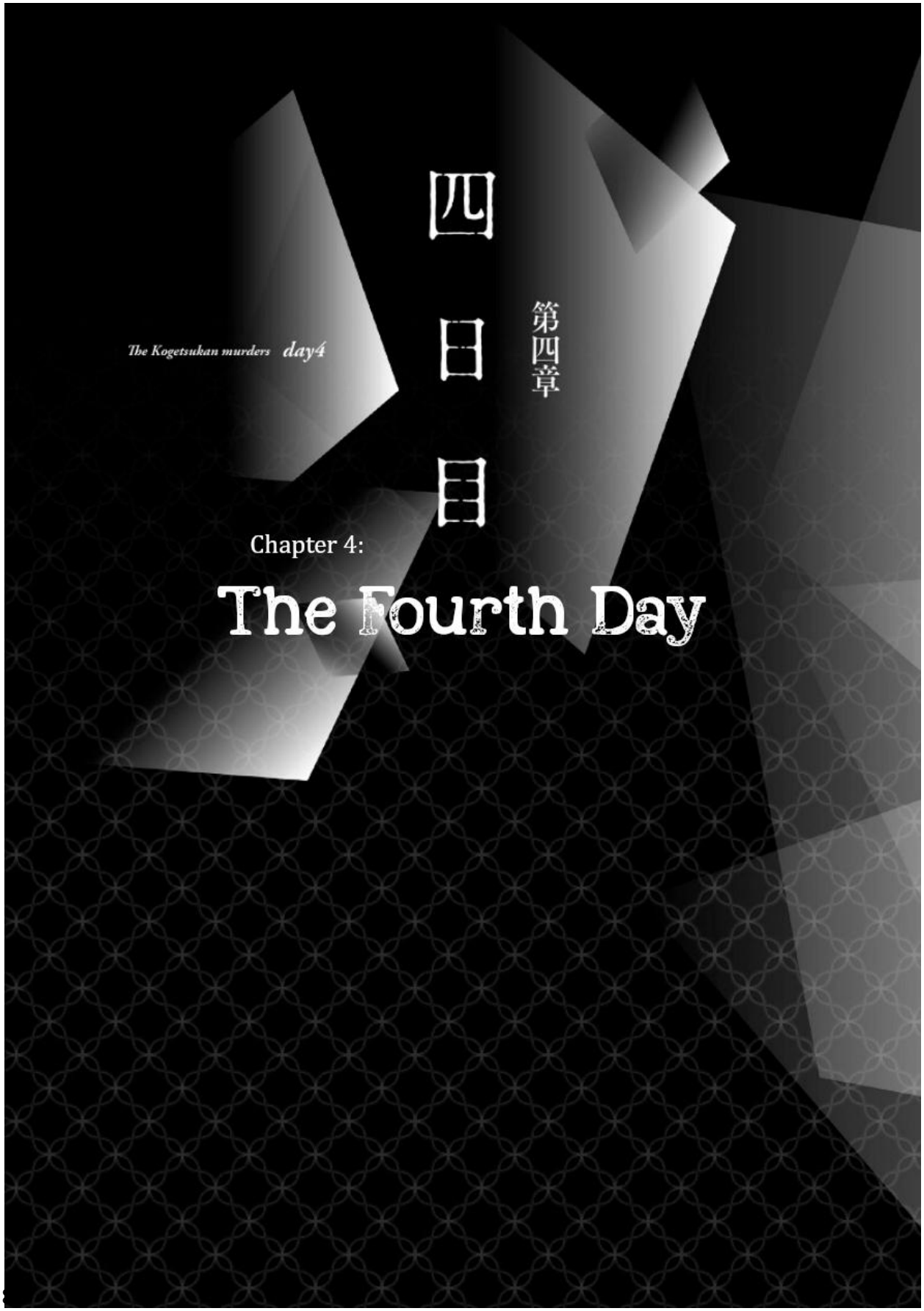
Thinking that it's probably for the best if I place the note into the care of the Marble Company, I went out into the corridor. Conveniently, I found Ann there, as if she was waiting for me.

"Oh, Rikka, just who I needed…"

I tried to show her what I'd found, but before I could, I felt her fist impact my stomach with a dull thump.

Why would… Ann…

With no hope for an answer to my question, my consciousness was torn away from me.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Chapter 4:
The Fourth Day

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Whenever I finally come to, I expect to be crossing over into the land of the dead. Did Ann kill me after attacking me in the night…?

However, instead, I found myself neither there nor in Chaldea, but in my room at the Kogetsukan once more. I've been here so many times now that I can recognize it at a glance.

"Good, you're awake."

When I hear Ann's voice saying that to me, I stand up in my bed in a heartbeat. I don't think I can take her down one-on-one, but that doesn't stop me from still taking a fighting stance against her.

But against my expectations, Ann actually instead gave me a bow. "I apologize for getting a bit rough with you earlier." …Looks like she had a different reason to knock me out like that.

"C'mon, can't you see Sis is bowing her head? Get down off your bed and have a seat." Somehow evading my detection until now, I saw Wǔ leaning against the wall. As long as he's here, hopefully I can put my life in his care. With that in mind, I sat back down on my bed to listen to Ann's story.

"Light night, Wǔ found some strange powder on the table as he was cleaning up."

"I figured someone had attempted a poisoning, but we needed to find the victim before we went searching about for the poisoner. Sis and I split up to see how everyone was doing, and she found you looking sick." Ahh, and that's when she found me in the hallway.

"We needed you to throw up as quickly as possible, so as I said, I'm afraid I had to get a bit rough."

"Sis has been watching over you ever since she carried you in here. I already cleaned up the mess you made when you threw it up." So the master chef had to clean up his own food off the floor… I can't help but feel sorry about that. "It doesn't look like there are any aftereffects, so it might've just been a crushed-up sleeping pill. But even a sleeping pill can be dangerous. If you'd been taking a bath when it kicked in, you'd be dead. And then there's this thing." Wǔ waved around the fake suicide note. "I doubt you wrote this yourself. There's a couple ancient computers and a dusty old printer here, but who would go out of their way to use those to write a suicide note?"

Thank goodness, I don't even have to explain it myself. No, I think anyone with a rational mind would have realized that Rikka would have never committed suicide in the first place. It's honestly as if it was some childish prank…

"It'll be morning soon, and our ride is coming around noon. If we can hold out till then, we should be able to go home safely." With that, Anne turned to leave, with Wǔ following suit behind her.

"We're gonna be staying up to keep an eye on things. If you need help, just holler and I'll come running."

After the two of them left my room, I couldn't fall back to sleep. Partially because I had just had an attempt on my life, and partially because there were so many mysteries that were unsolved. Eventually, I figured that it must be time for breakfast, so I got myself ready and left my room. I thought I would still be early, but everyone else was already in the dining room waiting to be served.

"Mornin', Rikka." His tone was pretty cheerful, but taking a closer look it was clear Wǔ had large circles under his eyes.

"You look tired, Wǔ. Why don't you get some rest?" Juliet teased from her seat, not knowing what had happened after we parted ways last night.

"Thanks, but don't you worry your head about me. I can stay up for three days straight if I feel like it. Though I'll admit I'm feeling sleepier now that you're all here. It's a lot easier keeping an eye on everyone when you're all in one place."

At that moment, the ringing sound of the doorbell echoed through the dining room once again.

"The doorbell? But… we're all here, aren't we?" Dorothy questions.

Aaron raises an eyebrow as well. "Is that our ride?"

"Definitely not. My people would never ignore my orders."

"Well, someone must be outside. Though the only one I can think of who might pull this kind of thing is that detective… Wait here. I'll be back." Wǔ took off for a second, then returned only a moment later. "Bad news. I hate to tell you this now, but… Sheringham's body is missing."

"Wh-what did you just say!?" Adamska and Aaron uttered almost simultaneously, of course shocked by such a strange claim.

"You're kidding… Since when?" Harriet anxiously asks.

"I didn't notice sooner because it was wrapped up in sheets, but when I took another look, it turned out to be a bunch of logs. I don't know when the body was swapped out, but there's no shortage of wood outside they could have used."

"Don't beat yourself up over it, Wǔ. I wouldn't have thought to keep an eye on dead bodies, either," Ann consoled the frustrated Wǔ.

Aaron inquired, "What's the meaning of this, Ann? Are you saying Sheringham is the one behind all of this?"

"We can't say for sure, but it's certainly a possibility."

"I have heard stories of people thought to be dead coming back to life, but… Wait, hang on." Wǔ seemed to have come up with something, getting the attention of the gloomy onlookers. "I just had a crazy thought. Mr. Adamska, yesterday you suggested that the killer could have swapped in a body to make us think Morris was dead when he wasn't, right?"

Adamska was clearly confused, but confirmed it nonetheless, "That's right. But we dismissed it because we figured the killer had no way of getting a substitute body…"

"That's right, but then… if the killer did have a body on hand, then they could swap it in. If Morris took Sheringham's body from the basement, dyed his hair blond, then let the fish do the rest…"

"But…" Eva sulked at Wǔ's reasoning, "Could anyone actually do something so terrible?"

"Even if this means Morris is still alive, I can't be particularly happy about this, considering it means my son has started down a truly monstrous path," Aaron voices his woes, but Ann steps in, shifting her eyes around the room.

"It's too soon to jump to conclusions. As said before, Sheringham himself could be the killer for all we know."

"Whoever or whatever kind of bastard did this, we need to find them and make them pay. Let's split up and search outside."

"Are you trying to put our guests' lives in danger, Wǔ? Our ride out of here will be here at noon. All we need to do is wait for them to arrive."

Wǔ bit back, "Come on, Sis, you know as well as I do that we can't let the killer stay here and get away with this. Do you really want to let something like that disgrace the company?"

Perhaps because her subordinate had landed a blow on her pride, Ann fell silent.

"I am grateful for the option to return home safely, but I admit that I don't like the idea of letting these events stay a mystery, either."

"I would also like to know the truth behind my son's death, if possible."

Adamska and Aaron both shared their opinions. With the heads of both families on board, Ann was forced to reluctantly accept Wǔ's plan.

"All right, then let's use these last few hours we have here to find the killer. That said, we can't bring the women and children along with us… Well, except for you, Rikka. Just stick by my side, alright?"

Has Wǔ started to take a liking to me? While wondering this, I nodded obediently. As long as Wǔ's with me, I'll be safe.

"In that case, I'll stay behind, in case the killer comes back and tries to take hostages." And with Ann protecting the rest, that clears my only hangup on joining the search team.

"Ooh, ooh, I wanna go on the manhunt too!"

"Cain, no, you can't…" Juliet, unable to control Cain's enthusiasm, looked to me for help, "You'll get in Rikka's way, you know?"

"Rikka… would I really?"

I didn't really want to take Cain with me, but when he looked at me with his watery puppy dog eyes, it was hard to turn him down. Aftering hesitating a bit, I decided to grab Cain's hand as a sign that I'll take him with me.

"Yaaay! We're gonna go beat up that bad guy!"

Juliet looked at me with utter disbelief. “Ugh, you’re too soft on him… But, I guess that’s also part of what’s so great about you.” Juliet’s expression became more tender as she finished speaking.

“All right, then. I’ll keep both little Cain and Rikka safe myself, don’t worry.”

“Be careful, Rikka.”

With Juliet’s sweet voice as a parting gift, I left the Kogetsukan along with the rest of the men on the team.

Our search naturally gravitated towards the dense forest behind the Kogetsukan. It would be a tough place for someone to live in, but that’s exactly why it’d be a blind spot.

“A-all right, we’ll look over here.” Adamska is shaking like a leaf. He doesn’t seem like he’s suited for this kind of dirty work, but is still trying to take the lead, perhaps out of his sense of responsibility as patriarch.

“Thank goodness there was a hunting rifle around. Though with my aim, I’m afraid it will be little more than a security blanket,” Hawthorne jokes, checking the magazine. Still, the gun looks enough to kill a wolf as long as he gets a good shot.

“Even if your aim is lacking, if you do find Morris, would you mind sparing his life? I at least want to ask him why he did all of this.”

Wǔ responded to Aaron’s uncharacteristically softhearted request, not with his usual quips or smile, but with deadly seriousness, “Understood on our end. You guys be careful out there.”

“Yes, same to you all.”

Adamska, Aaron and Hawthorne went deeper into the forest, disappearing from sight.

As they did, Wǔ turned towards us and smiled. “Okay, we’re going to check out that area. The doc took the only hunting rifle we’ve got, but we won’t need a gun with me around.”

“Ooh ooh, do you know kung fu? Jeet Kune Do? Wing Chun? I wanna see, I wanna see!”

Wǔ looked at Cain, who was now letting out ‘Wha-tah!’s to mimic his favorite martial arts star, regretfully knowing he had to let the boy down. “I’m afraid the only moves I know are lethal attacks. Trust me, they’re not very entertaining to watch.”

Suddenly, the grass behind us begins to rustle.

“Gotcha!” Wǔ immediately threw a pebble into them, a small whimper coming from the brush on impact. “What, just a dog?”

What instead crawled out was an entire pack of wolves, either furious that we were intruding on their territory or defending their wounded packmate.

“Oh, it’s these guys again. Sorry Rikka, but I’m gonna need a little time to drive ‘em off. Can you take the kid and hide somewhere? I don’t want you two getting hurt by

mistake." As he spoke, Wǔ gave a jumping kick toward the pack. But this time, the wolves didn't give in to his intimidation.

Not wanting to become collateral damage, I took Cain's hand and dashed to find a safe place to escape to.

"Let's hide, let's hiiide!" Cain is still acting as flippant as ever, making me wish I hadn't brought him out here.

"…Man, oh man. Hopefully we'll be safe over here."

I nod without looking behind me at him. Who do you think's fault this is, anyway?

"Whatever happens now, everyone'll just write it off as an unfortunate accident."

Noticing Cain's entire manner of speaking change, I turn around to see him brandishing what looks like a large knife.

"Surprised? I've been putting on an act up till now. This is the real me. Not even Father knows this about me."

As I instinctively took a step back, Cain matched by lurching forward, planning to slowly close the distance and finish me off with one blow.

"So, any last words before I kill you? Dying out here on a remote island, all alone… Honestly, I almost feel sorry for you." At least if I'm killed here, I'll have the wolves to keep me company for dinner. "I might be a trickster, but I really don't like being around liars. Especially ones who lie to my family."

So Cain knows too, then… But still, I don't want to break the promises I've made. If I keep quiet, he'll kill me. If I plead my case and apologize, I doubt Cain will believe me. He has me in checkmate. Even yelling won't help me, as I doubt even Wǔ would get here in time. My only option is to take him in a fight to buy time for someone to come. My odds aren't good, but the more hits I can get on him, the more likely someone is to get here. I have to take everything I can get.

As I was steeling my resolve, a silhouette jumped from the grass. "Well then, now seems an opportune time to make my entrance. I certainly cannot allow this to continue," the supposedly dead, self-proclaimed detective of some renown said, as if this was a trivial reveal.

The detective may have been unarmed, but he was able to parry all of Cain's slashes and stabs with no effort. It was almost as if this was a mock battle, coaching him on how to more effectively strike.

"Urk…"

The detective had kicked away the knife from his hand, finishing with a palm thrust into Cain's gut, sending him to the ground with a strange groan.

"You've been quite the rascal, haven't you? Now sleep well," the detective said to his fallen foe before looking to me with a smile. Hopefully not because I'm his next prey… "Good day, Rikka Fujimahr. Or rather, Mr. Ritsuka Fujimaru. I trust you are uninjured?"

At the drop of my true name, I finally realize that before me is none other than the real Sherlock Holmes. It was almost enough to make me scream then and there. Barely

holding my voice back, I settled instead to stamp my feet and give Holmes a few playful punches in the chest.

"Ah, I could not have hoped for a better reaction! Though, I will say you still pale in comparison to Watson!" Holmes had a nice big smile on his face as he took the beating in the chest, completely satisfied with his great unveiling. "Now, much as I would like to answer the questions so obviously nagging at you, it is hard to determine where to even begin. Ah, perhaps I should start with how I came to be here?"

Oh, if he's going to start breaking it down, I should compose myself and lend an ear. Stopping my attack, I backed up from him and listened.

"Ever since this mystery began, I've been wondering how much of a time differential there was between your dream and reality. I further thought that, depending on what that differential turned out to be, I might be able to intervene directly. Your walk on the beach with Juliet during a full moon provided a significant hint. Indeed, it was elementary to connect the dots, even for someone as ignorant of astronomy as myself. At Chaldea, you collapsed while looking at the moon on May 7th, 2017. You woke up for the fifth time on the 8th, Chaldea time, and still the moon was not yet full. This led me to realize that your dream was actually taking place a few days in the future. Once I knew that, I decided to intervene directly, and now, here we are."

So then this is all happening in the future…? That's hard to believe, but it seems to be the only way this would be possible.

"If you don't believe me, go ahead and look up a lunar calendar for yourself. You'll see that the full moon in May 2017 falls on the 11th here. If you count backwards from that, we can determine that Cain accidentally hit you with his ball in the afternoon of May 9th, Kogetsukan time, marking the point where your dream began. Since it was the 8th at Chaldea when I arrived at this conclusion, I had a day to plan."

So then, from the first day, Sheringham was Holmes all along? But then why use an alias when coming to help me?

"I know what you're likely to ask next. When I was thinking of how I should go about intervening, I had a flash of insight. While it's possible that the Sheringham you saw was a completely different person, and your brain merely happened to assign him my appearance given that we are both detectives, it was also possible that he could have been me merely claiming to be Sheringham. If so, I could certainly bring the latter circumstance about, thereby directly intervening as one of the key figures."

Does he have any idea how reckless that was!?

"Ah, please don't give me such an angered look. So long as there is a path to solving this case, then by definition, whatever steps I take along it are the right ones."

I know he's supposed to be the quintessential flawless detective, but I didn't expect him to go this far…

"Granted, I will concede that making my way here was fairly complicated. I first contacted the Goldie family as Sheringham, using my knowledge of the threatening letter to

capture Aaron's attention. Though of course, he was rightfully suspicious of me, so he said he would only hire me if I managed to track down where they were staying on my own. From there, it was simply a matter of filling in the blanks, rather like a crossword puzzle. Given the travel time from the United States, and the fact it was warm enough to go swimming even in the middle of May, I was almost immediately able to determine that you were somewhere in the Caribbean. Finding the Kogetsukan seemed trickier, but then I remembered that 'kogetsu' is an old Japanese word for 'crescent moon.' Using a map, I was able to pinpoint an island that was shaped like a crescent moon. The rest, you know. With all the information, it was quite easy to deduce it step by step. The only difficult part was convincing Da Vinci to let me come here, since doing so required me to Rayshift. In the end, I needed to make a temporary contract with a staff member located in America before I—"

I put my hand up to stop him. If I just let him run his mouth we'll be here all day and night, and neither Holmes nor Rikka can afford to let that happen.

Holmes gives a disappointed shrug. "I take it you're the sort of reader who prefers to skip to the ending? I suppose time is of the essence, so I will indulge you and provide you with the abridged version. But if you don't mind, I'll save the explanation of how I came back to life until everyone is here—"

"N-nng…" Cain's groans interrupted Holmes's chatter. I knew he hadn't killed him, but he must have used the perfect amount of force just to knock him out for a quick nap. Baritsu truly is a martial art to be afraid of.

"Ah, it seems the rapscallion is awake. Let's see what he has to say for himself, shall we?"

On waking up, Cain stared dumbfoundedly at Holmes, his memory slowly catching up to the current moment. "What a sly prank, playing dead like that…" Cain spit his frustrated words at Holmes.

"I believe I could say the same of you, playing the fool this whole time."

Cain pushed back any remaining pieces of his false personality, looking miffed before eventually giving up and speaking back, "Yeah, well, good point I guess. In the Violet family, the eldest son is supposed to take over when he comes of age, but I really didn't want to get involved in that world."

"So you decided to simply put on the act of a strange lad whose mind never quite left Neverland, all to forfeit your right to lead the family?"

Cain shook his head in shame at Holmes's words. "I feel really bad for making my family worry about me, but it's better than getting murdered 'cause of some stupid grudge or something."

I can definitely get why he would do this, though. Between turf wars, coups, betrayals and people who kill just because they can, there's no shortage of ways to get yourself killed in the underworld. I certainly wouldn't want to live that life.

"…But then, why did you abandon your pretense and show your true colors all of a sudden?"

"Because I thought that Juliet's friend here was the killer. I couldn't think of anyone else who it could be." Me!? How could you possibly come to that conclusion? "I thought Rikka did it to save Juliet. And I actually appreciate that much, at least, I couldn't stand that Morris guy either. But killing Chris just seemed wrong. The only reason I could think of was so that you could keep Juliet to yourself, not to help her. Plus, if Rikka was willing to kill those guys, then who's to say my family is safe? That's why I had to do something! I thought if I was threatening enough, I could get a confession!" I guess I'd never thought about my own possible motive that much…

"You can relax, Cain. I can assure you that Rikka would never kill anyone."

"But then, who else could be the killer? Nobody else could've done it!"

"On the contrary. This is a perfect closed circle of suspects. The killer has indeed been among us, from the very beginning. Now, Cain, I have a question for you. How do I know you are innocent?"

Cain tried to muster up his confidence for his reply, "I don't know when Morris died, so I can't say anything about that, but I might have an alibi for when Chris died."

"Does that mean you can prove where you were at 11:25 on the night of his death?"

"I was playing hide-and-seek with Laurie in an empty room. I think we got found about five minutes before that. Laurie will remember, we talked about how Rikka was a liar while playing."

"Is there a grown-up who can vouch for your story?"

"Dorothy came to look for us. We talked for a second before all going to bed."

"Just what I wanted to hear. I have all the pieces needed to convince me of your innocence. I'll have you testify about it when the time is right."

Cain looked at us with a worried expression. "Um, you're not gonna tell the others about my act, are you…?"

Holmes gave him a wink and a smile. "No, we won't. You should decide for yourself when you are ready to drop it."

Cain started to tear up as he smiled in thanks.

"Now then, you two, let us return to the Kogetsukan. It's about time we pulled back the curtain on this case."

"Aaaaaahhh!!!"

As we entered into the reception room, the screams of each of the women echoed through the hall, with only Ann and Laurie keeping their calm. As expected from how Holmes last exited the Kogetsukan, what awaited him on his return was not hospitality.

"Ah yes, a splendid overreaction! Still not quite so good as Watson's, though," Holmes bantered, looking on with satisfaction.

"What happened!?" Hearing the screams, the rest of the men outside returned as well.

"No way… I can't believe you're actually alive." Wǔ took up a fighting stance. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't curious about whether Holmes's baritsu or Wǔ's assassination kenpō would come out on top, but I can't let them actually fight here.

Aaron's temperament also changed upon seeing Holmes. From his point of view, he probably thinks of him as a traitor who left his sons to die, on top of wondering how he could have come back after this long. "Sheringham, I'm going to need you to explain what the meaning of all this is."

"I agree. And choose your words wisely." Both patriarchs were out of breath, likely due to their age, but were still posturing to protect their families.

Hawthorne, on the other hand, wasn't even holding his rifle, instead watching with great interest.

"Now, now everyone, if you attack me now you may never get the answers you crave. If we can all calm ourselves, I can begin my clarification."

Wǔ gave a click of his tongue and relaxed his muscles. The best detectives are experts in persuasion as well, I suppose.

"Good, it seems everything is in order, then. Now I can finally explain what happened that first night. Getting to the point directly, the culprit of this case is—"

"Wait. First things first, how are you even alive? You didn't have a pulse," Juliet stopped him, not pleased with his attempt to gloss over the story of his survival.

"Oh, that? A trivial matter. One need merely clech a ball under one's armpit to cut off circulation to that arm and temporarily halt one's pulse. It's an old trick now, but it was once a respectable medical technique known as pressure-based hemostasis. Of course, the arm can become necrotic if one keeps it up for too long, but momentary use of the technique to laymen such as yourselves would not be cause for concern."

It's tempting to take Holmes's account at face value, but there's one major hangup—"Hold on… Perhaps enough to fool us, but Dr. Hawthorne's a professional. How could one possibly fool him?"

"Simple. I couldn't, so I didn't," Holmes states matter-of-factly.

"Then, you mean…" Juliet turned her incredulous gaze to Hawthorne, who looked at her apologetically.

"Yes, I am afraid I was in on it the whole time. I'm sorry for deceiving you all." Well that explains why he didn't take aim at Holmes with his rifle, then.

"Why would you do something like that…?" Eva raised a natural question. Holmes obviously needed Hawthorne's help, but why would he accept?

"Allow me to answer that. Dr. Hawthorne is, of course, the only medical professional on the premises. It was inevitable that he would be asked to perform an autopsy in the event someone turned up dead. So I made a deal with him on the first day. I promised that in exchange for his help faking my death, I would solve this case. After all, once the culprit thought I was out of the picture, they would be blind to my investigation." And thanks to that, Holmes ended up saving my life, as well.

"That makes it sound like you knew there was going to be a murder case here," Adamska asked quizzically, as if he can't believe it.

"Let us simply say that I knew this trip could not possibly have a peaceful end."

"You can't be serious, Doc. What were you thinking, trusting a shifty detective like this?" Wǔ questioned, his voice filled with spite from having lost his apprentice in this plan. "If he really is such a great detective, then—"

"Then I should have been able to prevent the murder before it happened?"

Instead of nodding along to Holmes finishing his sentence, Wǔ clicked his tongue once more. Seems like his dislike for Holmes is pretty deep-seeded.

"Mr. Wǔ, I am quite good at solving mysteries once they present themselves, but I am afraid that even I cannot solve what has not yet occurred. The quote of 'The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic,' rings quite true, I'm afraid." Holmes hand-waved away the contradiction, before whispering to me, "I doubt it would go over well if I told them I couldn't do anything that would have changed your dream. This was the only thing I could say. Never mind that I am, at heart, a creative critic," giving me a wink as he finished. This kind of flagrant show of irreverence is certainly something only Sherlock Holmes can pull off.

"All right, I still don't like you, but you might know what you're doing when it comes to detective stuff, even if it's taking you too long to get to the point."

"That is not how I would put it, but I assure you that Dr. Hawthorne would not have helped me unless he too had a sense that there was something dangerous afoot."

Harriet cast a wary glance at Hawthorne. "Doctor, don't tell me you—"

"Don't say a word more!" Hawthorne's anxiety was palpable, with some in the room beginning to cast suspicious looks upon him. "…Reprimand Sheringham if you must, but I am also responsible for him being here. Please, at least hear what he has to say," Hawthorne argued, regaining his composure.

"I appreciate that, Dr. Hawthorne. It's good to see that you look much nicer in person, as well. This is a good man, I assure you all." Right as Holmes finished, the grandfather clock behind him let out a loud gong. "At any rate, it's already noon, so I'm afraid we'll need to come to a resolution quickly if we are to do so before our transport arrives." Holmes spoke as if expecting the bell, giving his words a weight that dissuaded us from believing he was merely bluffing.

"Resolution…? Then you really already know who did it?"

"Of course, Mr. Goldie. I have completed my deductions and am prepared to present my findings. But before I get to that, there is one thing I'd like to confirm. Would you all come with me, please?" Without waiting for any responses, Holmes turned and left.

Wordlessly, he led us to Chris's room.

"What business could you possibly have here?" asked Aaron, puzzled.

"Simple: assessing his dying message. Given everything I have heard about him, Chris clearly possessed a strong will. He was the sort of man who would carry out an important job even at the cost of his life."

"Hearing that from you somehow pisses me off, but… you're still right. Both Sis and I knew how seriously he took his responsibilities."

"In my estimation, Chris believed he had completed his dying message by the time he passed, but was unaware that he had not drawn enough blood to finish it. But with this luminol powder, we can see exactly what he was trying to write down." Holmes uncapped and applied the powder to the letters on the ground. Soon after, the completed message was revealed.

"Whoa! 'mor' just changed into 'mom'!" Laurie shouted from Holmes's side, as if just witnessing a magic trick.

"As I thought, Chris did indeed try to write 'mom.' This is what I wanted you all to see before I shared my conclusions."

"'mom'? As in 'mother'?"

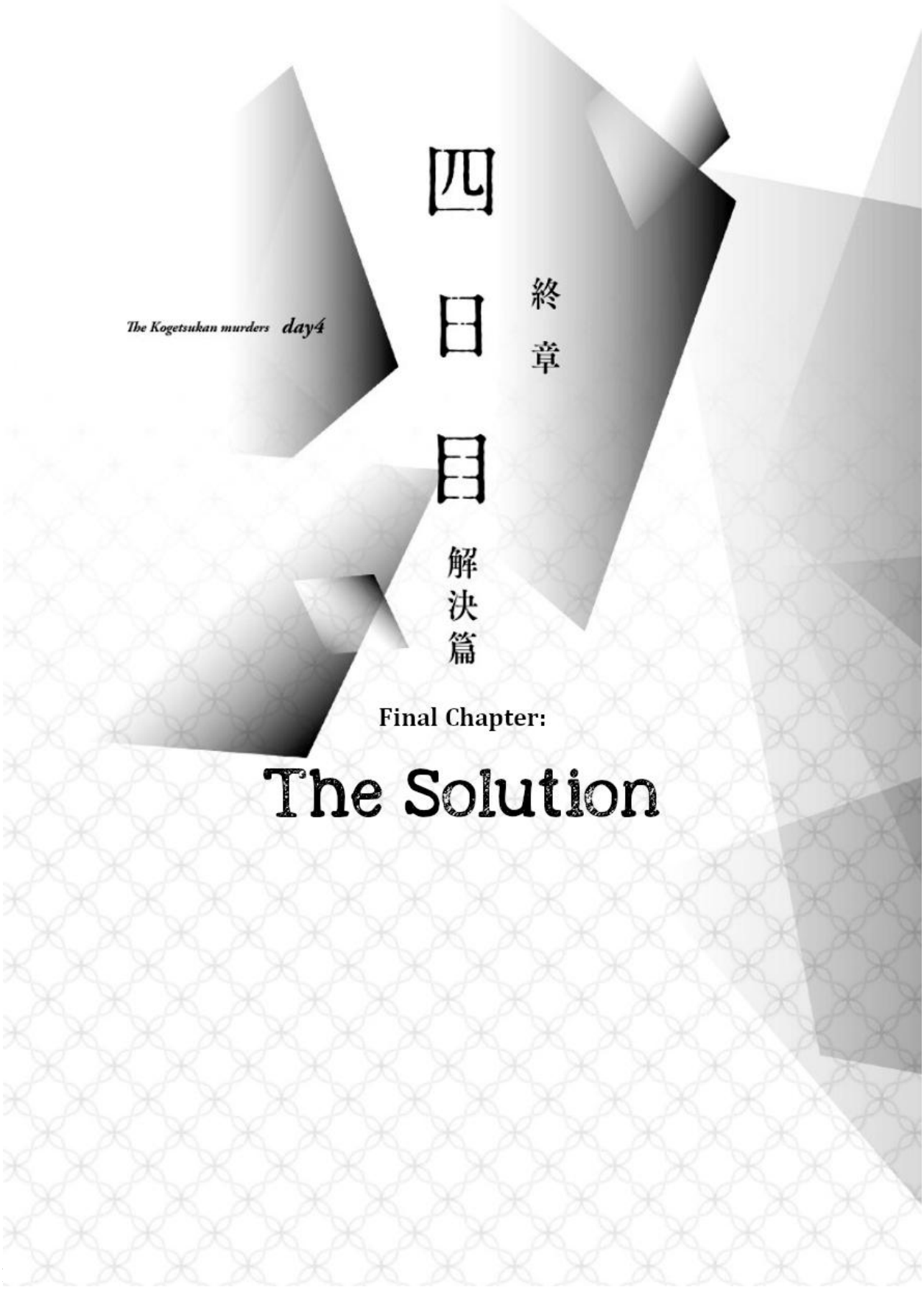
"Precisely so. And now, I will tell you why," Holmes confirmed Juliet's clarification, then turned to face the entire room. "The question is… which of the mothers here did Chris mean to accuse?"

Challenge to the Reader:

…Right, then. We have all the pieces of the puzzle now. Prehaps you have begun to see the picture taking shape for yourself now? Our killer had a single, specific reason for killing Chris and Morris. Once you understand the motive, the killer's identity should become quite clear as well. But… even if you fail to recognize the motive, the killer's identity should still be clear.

Allow me to offer a special hint to you, dear reader. Have you ever felt that something was off during your time reading? You may choose to examine what made you feel that way, or you may simply discard it as a red herring, the choice is yours. Nonetheless, I assure you, there will be no new information regarding the case of the murder at the Kogetsukan that you could not have deduced yourself, so take some time to consider all of the evidence.

But do keep one point in mind while you deliberate. The case of the murder at the Kogetsukan is not an ordinary one…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The Solution

Final Chapter: The Solution

Aaron was the first of the group to respond to Holmes's statement, "So, Chris was actually trying to write 'mom'…? Did you kill him then, Ann!?"

Ann was not upset at the accusation, however. Rather, she looked somewhat forlorn. "No, I didn't. I never told Chris that I was his mother." The truth of their relationship now lay bare for everyone to see.

"I was wondering why you two seemed so chummy… Now it all makes sense," Dorothy, on the verge of hysterics, barely managed to get out in response.

Ann, attempting to defuse the situation, corrected her calmly, "That was a long time ago, Ms. Dorothy. Whatever Aaron and I had was over long before you met him. I only acted as if we weren't actually related… because I feared having a family would make me weak…" Thinking back to Chris's reaction before his death, it was clear that Ann was telling the truth.

"Chris died without ever knowing who his mother was. As such, he would never have accused Ann by writing the word 'mom.' No, I believe that he simply meant to tell us that his killer was a mother, if not necessarily his own."

"Hang on. You cannot base all of this simply on Chris's dying message! A scant few letters written in the blood of a dying man leave quite a lot open to interpretation." Hawthorne raised a fair point, but Holmes wasn't shaken by it one bit.

"Yes, your doubts are valid. Perhaps a victim's dying message is not sufficient proof. Very well then, let us take a more roundabout approach. If we remove all other possible suspects via the process of elimination, I'm certain none of you will have any objections."

"What do you mean by that?"

Holmes raised an eyebrow at Adamska. "Remember back to your alibis for the time of Chris's murder, if you will. You see, the culprit had no idea that Chris broke his beloved pocket watch at the moment of his murder. As a result, the watch stopped precisely at 11:25 p.m. Given the circumstances of Chris's death, we know that he had time to converse with the culprit beforehand. …Even estimating conservatively, I should think the culprit was in his company for five to ten minutes prior to killing him. This means that we can safely rule out anyone whose whereabouts around 11:25 p.m. on the night of Chris's murder are accounted for."

That's the same logic we thought of at the time of his autopsy, though in the end it wasn't clear to me whose alibis were missing.

"Let's start by winnowing down our suspect pool. The poker players at that time can be excluded."

"Does that include me?"

"Naturally. What's important is the fact you can all verify each other's alibis."

"Guess that means Rikka's alibi is solid too, since we could all hear their snoring in the next room." Thank goodness Wǔ is there for me, since otherwise I can't prove my alibi on my own.

"That leaves six possibilities."

"Six? You mean seven, right? Why do you automatically get a pass?"

"You did lock the outside doors and windows securely, did you not? If I had forced my way into Chris's room, surely you would have seen some sign of that." Honestly, Holmes could have found a way to sneak into the mansion without leaving a single trace of his presence, but I'll keep that to myself.

"Tch, you got an answer for everything, don't you? Fine, six left."

"Tell me, Cain, what is your alibi for that night?"

"Laurie and I were playing hide-and-seek then, weren't we, Laurie?"

Laurie gives a great big nod. "Uh-huh. I snuck out of bed to hide."

"We got caught sometime around 11:20."

"Children or not, I believe we can still take them at their word. That accounts for their whereabouts. This brings our suspect list down to four." The only ones not accounted for now are Dorothy, Eva, Harriet and finally Juliet. "Dorothy Goldie. You had motive, and you're a mother."

"It wasn't me! I didn't do it, I swear!"

"Indeed not," Holmes surprisingly agreed with Dorothy's plea of innocence.

"Huh?"

"It's okay, Ms. Dorothy. You're the one who caught us, remember? Around 11:20!" repeating what he said in the woods, Cain laid out her alibi.

As she was told this, Dorothy scratched her head in embarrassment. "Oh… right. I completely forgot about that. How silly of me." …Probably not something you want to admit that you forgot about.

"Cain told me that you were the grown-up who could verify his alibi, being that you saw each other when you came to find Laurie. That leaves us with three…"

Holmes is beginning to make me nervous with who he's leaving for last… is he a sadist or something!? Whoever the real culprit is, I need to step in and make it clear it can't be Juliet!

"…I can sense Rikka beginning to become angry with me, so let us move ahead of schedule and discuss Ms. Juliet's alibi. She has someone to verify her alibi, as well, and I have no reason to doubt its legitimacy. May we leave it at that for the moment and explore our remaining avenues?"Holmes asked, frustrated at my disruption.

Still, I'm satisfied with Juliet being taken out of the suspect lineup. But at this point, the only two other suspects are Eva and Harriet… Juliet is going to have her heart broken no matter the outcome. What a horrible case. This is nothing less than a tragedy through and through for all involved…

"At any rate, that leaves us with two… but enough suspense. One of the two already knows she's innocent. Which leaves the other our culprit. Ms. Juliet, would you mind telling us who you were with on the night Chris was killed?"

Juliet was clearly hesitant to answer, knowing that her answer could be a death sentence for one of her family. "…My sister. So then… Oh, god…"

That's Harriet's alibi then, leaving the culprit to be…

Eva looked at her family with tearful eyes. I wonder if she's already accepted her fate.

"The culprit was not inherently opposed to your families forming an alliance. She understood it as necessary for your continued survival. That's why Cain and Laurie are both still alive. They must be, after all, for the alliance to happen. And yet she resorted to murder not once, but twice, and at the peril of compromising the entire plan. That is key to understanding her motive, precisely how opposed she was to Juliet's engagement."

"But… why would Mother want to kill Morris and Chris? What reason could she possibly have?" Mother… Eva, why exactly would you do this…?

"It's exceedingly simple, as it turns out. Think. Why would she be so against your marrying either Morris or Chris, but quite content to see Cain and Laurie married?"

"So, you're saying it was those specific pairings she had a problem with?"

"Precisely. Because your true father… is Aaron Goldie."

Ah! Why didn't I think of this explanation!? That would certainly be a strong motive.

"…You can't be serious…" Juliet glances between Eva and Harriet with a somber look on her face. Her mother, who cheated on Adamska, and her twin, who must also share Aaron's blood.

Eva turned her gaze downward to the floor, likely not being able to bear her actions coming to light.

Harriet, on the other hand, is motionless, as if turned to stone.

"Ms. Juliet, wedding either Morris or Chris would have meant wedding your half brother… An incestuous marriage. But as your mother, only she would have known that. So she had to keep that fact to herself… even if it meant resorting to murder. Isn't that right?"

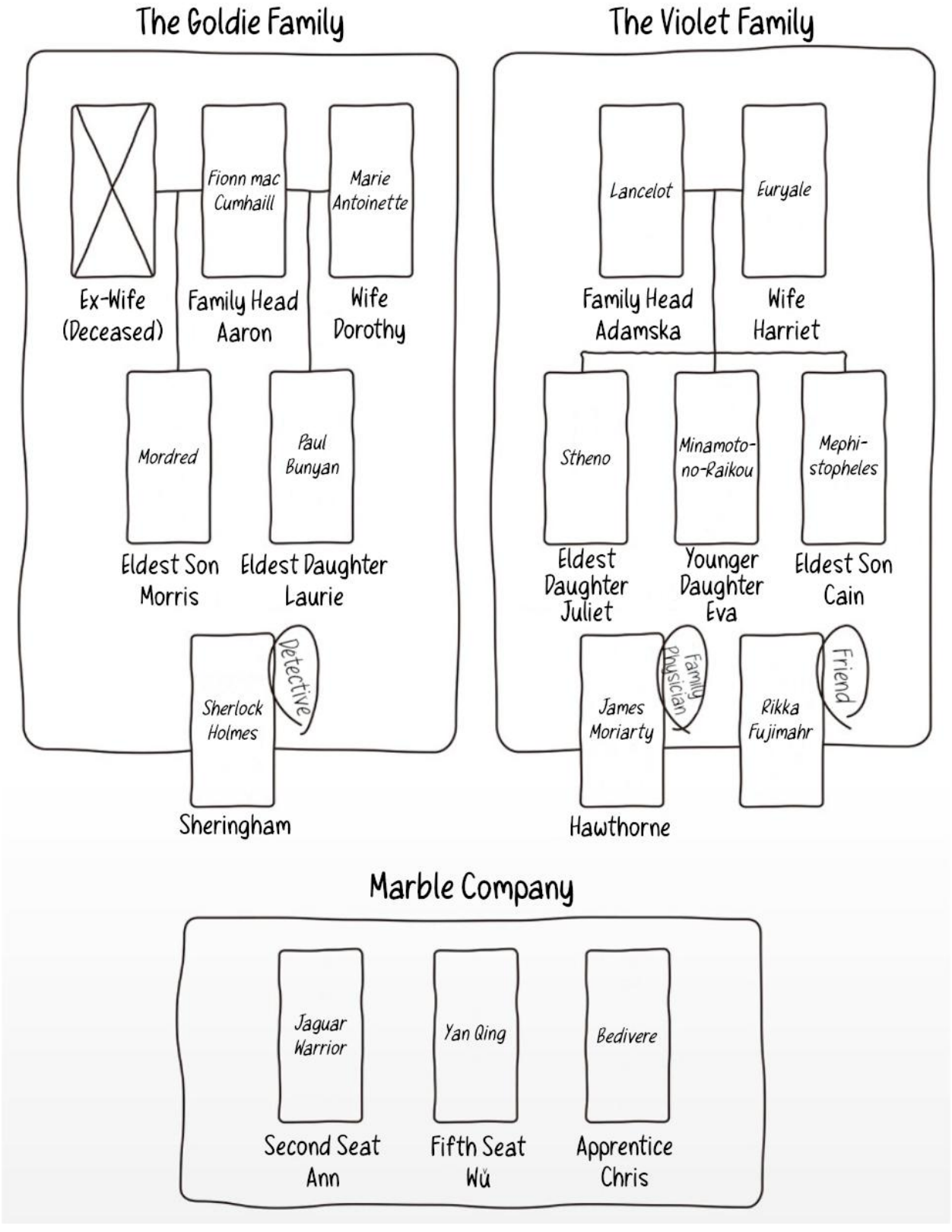
At Holmes's challenge to the killer, Eva fell to her knees. Despite what she's done, I can understand how she would crumble under this pressure. "This can't be happening…" Eva's strained throat was trying to say something, but cutting in and out. I tried to zero my hearing in to not miss what she has to say. "He's lying, right, Mother?" The one Eva looked to while saying that… was Harriet.

"No, the culprit can be none other than Harriet Violet."

Holmes's words finally made me realize the terrible misconception I had been taking at face value. This whole time I had thought Eva was the mother, but it was Harriet all along…!

"What? You mean I made a mistake with the Violet family tree I drew!?"

Not long after Holmes had left, Moriarty pointed out an error in Mash's chart on the whiteboard.


The Goldie Family
Fionn mac Cumhaill
Marie Antoinette
Ex-Wife (Deceased)
Family Head Aaron
Wife Dorothy
Mordred
Paul Bunyan
Eldest Son Morris
Eldest Daughter Laurie
Detective
Sherlock Holmes
Sheringham
The Violet Family
Lancelot
Euryale
Family Head Adamska
Wife Harriet
Stheno
Minamoto-no-Raikou
Mephi-stopheles
Eldest Daughter Juliet
Younger Daughter Eva
Eldest Son Cain
Family Physician
James Moriarty
Friend
Rikka Fujimahr
Hawthorne
Marble Company
Jaguar Warrior
Yan Qing
Bedivere
Second Seat Ann
Fifth Seat Wǔ
Apprentice Chris

"While I haven't checked the answer key, so-to-speak, I am quite certain that Harriet is Adamska's wife, while their daughters are Juliet and Eva. There are some things that don't entirely add up unless this is true."

"But, I drew it exactly how Senpai described it… If I'd made a mistake, he would have noticed."

Moriarty shook his head. "Ah, not necessarily. He is somewhat preoccupied with the personages of Chaldea. Perhaps a bit too much so, it turns out. By way of example… tell me, Mash, what do you think of when you think of Lancelot?"

"…The fact that he's Sir Galahad's father, I suppose," Mash replies apprehensively. She is right in that Lancelot is indisputably Galahad's father, however.

"There you have it. That is exactly the line of thinking that has tripped our Ritsuka up. If a woman who looks like Stheno told you she has a younger sister, you would immediately think of Euryale, no?"

"Ah!" A flash of realization came over Mash, finally realizing the point of Moriarty's lecture.

"Similarly, once Eva was assigned Minamoto-no-Raikou's appearance, it was assumed that she could not be anything other than the mother. Of course, I don't believe Juliet meant to deceive Ritsuka, since she had no way of knowing his unique circumstances. It was merely an unfortunate misunderstanding that persisted until now."

"But… Adam and Eve have to be together!"

"Oho?"

Despite knowing she was wrong, Mash still argued with the professor. "This way, the parents would be Adamska and Eva, and the twins would be Juliet and Harriet. It just makes sense! Why would they name them any other way!?"

Moriarty, however, batted away her desperate plea, "More likely they were named for their parents. Juliet's name was taken from Harriet, Eva's from Adamska. You see? Such an arrangement certainly makes sense. …Ahh, I feel like I'm back debating at university again."

"But, if Harriet is Juliet's mother… why do they look the same age?"

"Easy. Remember, Morris was a man who looked like Mordred. It's no surprise that there would be other disparities between what Ritsuka saw and reality. Something as simple as a difference in age could certainly be such a detail that was altered."

Mash closed her eyes and rubbed her temples. "This is so confusing…"

"I imagine Ritsuka must be even more confused, since he is only learning the truth in the moment via Holmes… That man has a dastardly habit of keeping information to himself until the very end, much to the chagrin of his companions."

"Senpai is kind of like that, too. I know the two don't mean anything bad by it, but… you know…" Mash pouted a bit, to which Moriarty smiled.

"Speaking of, it seems Ritsuka neglected to mention another detail… but I don't believe it will be relevant."

"Huh? Am I going to have to fix the chart again?" Mash looked at the whiteboard again, as if anything she knew could possibly be a lie at this point.

Moriarty gently remedies her, "No no, there's no more need for you to go back to it. The label for Rikka Fujimahr should still be appropriate, but… Holmes will likely see what I mean for himself, since he's checking in on them in person."

"Can't you just tell me now? I can't handle the suspense!"

Harriet was the killer… When that deduction left Holmes's mouth, grief flowed over the entire Violet family as if a dam had been broken.

"He's lying, right? Please tell me he's lying, Harriet!"

"How could you have done this, Mother?"

Wǔ, who was the first line of defense between the killer and the killed, was also shocked. "This lady is really the one who killed Chris!?"

The situation devolved into something Holmes could no longer talk over, as everyone was shouting at each other. It'll be a while before any of this dies down.

"Good grief, things have certainly gotten… noisy. Though it does make for a good opportunity to answer the questions you likely have," Holmes said in a lower voice that only I could hear. "Surely you must have seen the signs. For example… think back to the conversation you had when you asked Eva her alibi."

Right… back when I showed her my notepad that said 'Mrs. Violet: Did anything unusual happen around bedtime last night?'

"Mrs. Violet? Well that's a strange question… No, Mother turned in early last night. I think it must have been around ten… maybe eleven…? I'm sorry, I don't remember the exact time."

Now I get it… She must have thought I was asking about Harriet's alibi! The Raikou in Chaldea calls herself a mother so much that I didn't think anything of it… What a misunderstanding…

"It seems you remembered something. One such revelation tends to lead to others, like so many dominos."

"Now, now, you mustn't let your appearance slide over something like this. Haven't you noticed your hair getting sticky from the ocean breeze?" Eva chimed in, brushing her long, beautiful hair. She's terrifyingly persuasive, even just with a glance.

"Not really. It's not like I've been to the beach."

Hawthorne, who had been watching the conversation between the three with interest, slyly said to me from the side, "I must say, it's always fascinating to see twins with such… different personalities."

"So we're just supposed to believe you've got an alibi, huh?" Morris said, out of the blue. Maybe it's because he had gotten bored from all the talking, but he seemed ready to get in our way. "I mean, hypothetically speaking, couldn't twins swap places to pull this kinda thing off? Or some other kinda trick? Just sayin'."

"…No way. No one would get them mixed up like that. I know I wouldn't."

"Twins sure are something, huh?" Wǔ lets out, having been silently watching the exchange.

"Well, I know we're technically twins, but we're actually fraternal. I don't see much resemblance myself."

"Oh, did I say that out loud? I didn't mean it negatively or anything. I'm an only child, so it's interesting for me to see the kind of connection you guys have." Wǔ's not wrong, I think it's neat too. While their mother Eva is out swimming, both Juliet and Harriet are firmly planted under their umbrellas. The two twins are more alike than maybe she realizes.

"Personality-wise, I think she takes after Mother. They're both really free-spirited… I'm honestly kind of jealous."

"And you get your serious side from me."

"Sure, Daddy. Let's just leave it at that."

In an instant, my mind flashed back to a multitude of scenes from my time at the Kogetsukan.

"It's the same principle as optical illusions. Once you've seen something that isn't there, it can be very difficult to unsee it. There have even been cases that would have been solved very quickly had it not been for confusion regarding who is related to whom. For you, Harriet's alibi was supposed to have been verified by Eva, and Eva's alibi verified by Juliet. But as only Eva and Juliet were together at that time, that leaves Harriet without one. Furthermore, Harriet had no idea about Chris's pocket watch. Had it not been for that, things might have gone quite differently."

I turned my eyes to Harriet, afraid of what she might do. She may have been standing motionless earlier, but now she was staring back at me with a fearless smile on her face. That's the look of a woman ready for a war, not yet prepared to admit her guilt.

"That's quite the interesting theory, Detective. I can see where you got your renown." Harriet Violet folded her arms, firing her first shot.

What Sheringham announced was spot-on, sparing not even the smallest detail. Looking back on it, he's been toying with me right from the beginning. When I heard the news of Sheringham's death, I was emboldened by the thought of a like-minded individual being among me, disagreeing with the marriage. However, it also threw a wrench into my

plans, putting everyone on high alert. That's why I had to take the opportunity I had when I was alone with Morris. If I wasn't so jumpy, I could have planned his death better, in a way where his body would never have washed up. In a way where he would have never been able to track me… But none of that matters now. I need to stand up for myself here. If I admit defeat, everything I've done will be for nothing. Even if it's just a bluff, I have to say something. Anything!

"That's quite the interesting theory, Detective. I can see where you got your renown." All of my thinking resulted in nothing more than that cliché line. I couldn't help but laugh in my mind, but it was still thanks to me speaking up that I was able to begin regaining my confidence. Even if Sheringham faked his death to purposefully trigger the initial murder, there's no way any human could think this far in advance. I need to bet on the chance that he made some sort of mistake somewhere. "Still, isn't your argument pretty weak?" I decided to fight. It's obvious that everyone here believes I'm guilty, but there's still hope yet to change their minds.

"Oh?"

"By your theory, I certainly would have a motive, but isn't it a bit harsh to decry me as a murderer just because you don't think I have an alibi?"

"Hm… Perhaps you have a point." Sheringham raised the edge of his mouth into a grin. I recognize that smile. One of a hunter who's just set his sights on his prey. What an unsightly expression. "Then let me also speak on the attempted murder of one Rikka Fujimahr, which I believe I've neglected to mention until now."

Sheringham's words made the room abuzz with chatter once again. It may be true that I drugged Rikka with sleeping pills, but Rikka is here alive and well, meaning he shouldn't be able to make any concrete accusations against me.

"During last night's supper, it was found that someone had mixed sleeping medication into Rikka's meal. Fortunately, Rikka was in good company at the time of passing out, but had the timing been worse, it's highly likely we would have had another murder on this trip. Of course, that alone would be nothing but conjecture, but additionally, a falsified suicide note had been found within Rikka's room. I have no doubt that if the killer's plan had been successful, that note would have been found and thought of as genuine." …The suicide note that I had printed out on one of the old computers here. With that murder aborted, I didn't expect it to be found, but I still didn't leave any clues in it that could have connected it to me.

"And? How does this link back to me? Do you have any proof that I was the one who drugged Rikka?" I made sure to be very careful when handling the drugs. Even if I had left traces of it behind, there's no way he can prove it was me. Because of that, he's trying to accuse me in this roundabout way. And plus, if it was provable I would have already been taken into custody by the Marble Company duo.

It was then that Sheringham's grin turned into a full smile. "You are correct. I don't have any evidence that you were the one to forcefully administer Rikka's medicine. You are

quite skilled when it comes to all aspects of bluffs, Mrs. Violet. You would have done quite well in the poker match the other night." Hah, I knew it. His smile was nothing but that of a sore loser!

"I'll take that as a compliment, thank you." I can't believe I've done it. I was able to get out of check, clawing my way back out of hell and arriving at the gates of heaven…

"However, my goal of bringing this up was only to use it as a springboard for further discussion. Think about why Rikka Fujimahr would be the one chosen to play the part of the framed party. That is where the answer lies."

"And what is that supposed to mean?"

"Continuing with the assumption that you are the real culprit, someone who is neither a part of the Goldie or Violet family would be desirable to take the fall for your actions. That way, the alliance can continue with neither side harboring a grudge. Which would mean that the two possible choices would be either Dr. Hawthorne or Rikka… For you, avoiding killing an old friend such as Hawthorne would be preferable, so you instead decided to target your daughter's boyfriend."

"Mother… Please tell me this isn't true…" The sound of Juliet's pained voice hurts my ears. I truly did like Rikka as Juliet's boyfriend, but I couldn't just let myself be taken away from my family. No matter how painful the loss would be for Juliet, time would eventually heal her heart.

Of course, I admitted none of this, protesting his truthful claims, "You think I tried to kill Rikka? He's my own daughter's boyfriend. How could I take that away from her after all this?"

I felt a chill run through the room. I don't know how or why, but I felt my onlookers judging a misstep somewhere in my words.

"It is human nature to seek patterns, to find meaning and make connections, whether real or imagined. But to be quite frank, this is a trick of our subjective minds. An illusion," Sheringham said, as if giving a lesson to everyone else in the room but me. "Among us gathered here, who all noticed what I am referring to?"

At Sheringham's asking, the rest of the room raised a hand. There's no way they could have planned this in advance… Just what exactly is going on here?

"I realized while I was with Rikka on the beach. I may have… accidentally touched…"

"I noticed when I placed my hands on Rikka's shoulders in the hallway… but I just assumed you already knew, Harriet…"

Eva and Adamska hesitantly spoke up first. Unease started to overtake me as I heard them allude to whatever critical information I'm missing.

"I noticed rather early on, when Morris fought with Rikka. It seemed like Morris noticed while in their scuffle as well." Dorothy was next to answer.

"Well, uhh, when I had to carry Rikka after getting hit with my ball and going night-night…"

"Yep! And then Cain told me aaalll about it!"

The fact that even Cain and Laurie knew made me shudder.

"I figured it out while carrying Rikka too, back when we were going to the beach. Then, I told Sis about it after."

"Not like I needed to be told by him anyway. Watch enough people walking around, and you'll be able to tell just from someone's gait and stride."

Wǔ and Ann of course knew as well.

"I was likely last here to realize, aside from Harriet of course. As I was chatting with Juliet while admittedly tipsy, I discovered a certain… allure in Rikka after being saved from falling flat on my face." Even Aaron of all people piped up. What in the world is going on here?

"…It seems you truly are the only one who is unaware."

"Yes, yes, I don't know whatever it is you're talking about. Now are we going to continue dancing around the subject, or are you going to fill me in?" I looked to Juliet instinctively for answers. Juliet… A beautiful, innocent soul. My beloved daughter, so much like me. I've tried to raise her the best I could. That's why I had to sully my hands for her… "…Juliet? You know too, don't you? Can't you tell me?"

But Juliet remained silent to my plea.

"Now, there's no need to drag your daughter into this. Everyone has things they'd like to keep hidden, even if just for a short time. Even I can relate, in fact. In any case, as long as you properly think about it, you should be able to deduce this yourself."

"What are you—" In that moment, something clicked. "You can't mean…"

Rikka stepped in front of me, unraveling the bandage around their neck with one hand and unbuttoning their shirt with the other, confirming what I had guessed only a moment earlier. Now I see… I didn't think this could have been what they meant…

As if rubbing salt in the wound, Juliet looked at me with a pained expression, finally saying, "Mother… Rikka's a girl."

As Ritsuka laid asleep in Chaldea, Mash and Moriarty continued their heated discussion about the case.

"Wait, you're saying Rikka is a woman!?"

"Indeed. As with my last point, this needs to be true to explain everything."

"Well, I— They were so intimate that I…" Mash was so shocked that she couldn't make a complete sentence.

Moriarty continued his explanation undeterred, "Juliet first explained that Rikka couldn't speak due to damaged vocal cords. Yet in reality, she was still able to speak on occasion, correct? This seems to suggest that Juliet was lying. In fact, when young Ritsuka was giving us his many synopses, he didn't mention any vocal strain during those vocalizations."

"Now that you remind me, I do think I remember that… But, why would she lie like— Ah!" As she was about to ask, Mash realized the reason on her own.

"That's right, speaking would easily reveal her gender, would it not?"

"Ah… Right…!"

"The only reason she wore a bandage was to disguise her lack of an Adam's apple. That her larynx is naturally smaller than a man's."

Mash was at a loss for words when presented with something that seemed so obvious in hindsight.

"However, such efforts were always likely to only be a temporary fix. You must take great pains to fully disguise or pass as a different gender, and those not used to it are liable to make mistakes. Perhaps you could inquire about it with d'Eon or Astolfo some other time. Regardless, even if she doesn't speak up, her unconscious mannerisms and certain features can still give her away. Those who could actually touch Rikka likely found that she was a woman given due time."

"Do you think this is going to change the case at all, then?"

Moriarty answers Mash's innocent question with a large shake of his head. "I wonder? Though, you would be surprised how often small, seemingly unimportant details can become decisive factors in criminal cases such as this. If the killer had managed to miss this detail, I doubt that damnable detective would let them off the hook, as they say. Wouldn't you agree?"

"Rikka has always stood by me, no matter what. She's always been so nice… and really cool, too," Juliet began, now telling her side of the story. "She's been watching over me for so long, when Rikka noticed that something was eating away at me while at college, she didn't hesitate to ask about it. And then, when she found out I was going on an engagement trip that I didn't even want, she offered to go with me. Rikka told me that if she took the role of my boyfriend, it would be a way to protest the choice of my family, and keep the Goldies in check from making any advances on me…"

"Sheesh, treating this like a little student protest… But still, I could tell what Rikka was trying to do, and I respected it enough to not go blabbing about it to anyone except my boss." Wǔ's correct. A protest like this wouldn't do much on its own, and certainly wouldn't stop the engagement we had planned.

"Yes, it may have been a plan that would have been easily foiled if anyone truly wanted to, but still… It made me happy. Most importantly, I would be able to have someone with me who I could trust with all my heart… So I decided to go with Rikka's suggestion. Of course, I couldn't keep this a secret from Dr. Hawthorne during his checkup, so I had to tell him, but thankfully I could trust him with it."

"I always keep my promises, no matter the consequence to myself," Hawthorne said with a twinge of regret. Even Hawthorne, who has always given me whatever I want, never told me Rikka's gender at the behest of Juliet. He's as sweet on my daughter as he is on me.

I noticed that Juliet and Rikka were always in their rooms together alone once we came to the Kogetsukan, but I had assumed that they were being lovey-dovey. In reality, they were likely keeping the disguise from falling apart or having a strategy meeting…

"From what I could gather, you are heterosexual, are you not? Regarded as quite the catch in your youth by men, as well. That is why you had no doubt that your daughter had brought a man, as you instinctually related Juliet with your own life experience." As Sheringham said this to me, I snapped back to my senses.

"Y-yes, what of it?" I can't lie, I was certainly a bit upset that Rikka had deceived me the whole time and was a woman, but there's no need to admit it aloud. "Don't make it sound like I'm crazy just because I was unaware she's a woman. Anyone would assume after seeing them be that intimate."

Sheringham is unfazed by my response. "Have you forgotten the suicide note that you had penned? In this note, Rikka bemoans the fact that as her boyfriend, he was jealous of Juliet's two suitors. However, as Rikka is a woman, there is no way she could have written this herself." Right… That was a crucial mistake… "Neither could anyone else here who knew that Rikka was a woman. The only possible person who could have written this is you, Harriet," Sheringham said, declaring check and mate.

When I was young, I always kept obedient, harmless boyfriends. Ones who were all-so-willing to lay down their lives for me. That's what I assumed Rikka was to Juliet, clouding my judgment… This must be what the detective meant with his speech about illusions. …Maybe this is my comeuppance for treating Hawthorne so flippantly for so long.

"I have to say, you certainly found one hell of a detective, Aaron." I know I'm cornered, but I can't help but get off one last sarcastic comment. If it weren't for this meddling Sheringham, I would have gotten away with all this…

"Then, you really did kill them… Ah, it's all coming back to me now… Twenty years ago I had a one-night stand with a woman I never saw again. Yes, that was you! You even mentioned your name was Harriet!" Hah, I suppose my consolation is the fact that I was Aaron's 'one that got away,' the one he could never keep his mind off of forever.

"I was just looking to have some fun. I didn't want to cause any more trouble than was necessary, so I left out my family name."

"No wonder Juliet seemed so familiar. Your blood runs thick in her, she looks just like you did back then."

"I did enjoy that night we spent together, Aaron. I have no regrets about that part. But I didn't find out until later that I'd become pregnant with Juliet and Eva as a result. By the time I had, it was already too late… My parents had promised me to Adamska. I had little say in the matter."

"I already knew you were pregnant when we got married, Harriet. You have nothing to feel bad about!" Adamska yelled in desperation. Perhaps he already knows what I'm planning from here. I may have made a lot of mistakes in my life, with many of them piling on top of each other to lead to this, but if there's one thing I've never regretted, it's marrying you. A wonderful father, and the greatest husband, my beloved Adamska.

"Thank you, Adamska. I do so adore how understanding you are. But I just couldn't tell you, or my parents, who Juliet and Eva's father really was. If I had, my father would have been so angry he would have started a war with the Goldie family. But I never imagined a secret I decided to keep almost twenty years ago could lead to… this…" The cost of that night really outweighed the gain…

In the afternoon of the second day, Morris came to meet with me without question.

"So what's up Harriet? Whaddya want with me all the way out here?"

I chose the northern cliff in order to avoid us being seen talking… I never planned to kill anyone at first.

"I have a favor to ask you… I want you to reconsider your engagement to Juliet."

"Huh? Where'd that come from? And what's it matter to you?"

"…I'm sorry, but I can't tell you that." There's no way I could let anyone know that they were blood related at this point.

"I don't get it… but okay, I'm fine taking Eva instead. She's more my type, anyway."

"I'm sorry, but I cannot let you marry Eva, either."

Morris clicked his tongue. "And why's that?"

"…I can't tell you."

Both of us were painfully silent for a moment, before Morris let out a sigh. "Man, this is nuts… Are all you Violet chicks this crazy? I don't know why my old man's so afraid of you guys. He should've made up an excuse to invade your turf long ago."

With his reply, I realized that Morris and I would never see eye to eye. I couldn't possibly tell the truth, as if I did it could lead to an all-out war between our families. My only option was to push him off the cliff beside us. After making my snap decision, my body quickly followed suit.

"Oh, look, Morris! Can you see that ship over there?"

Morris's gullible head followed the direction I pointed in, trying to catch a glimpse of an imaginary ship on the coastline. "Huh? There's no way a ship'd come all the way out—"

I gave a single push as hard as I could, my hands firmly on his unsuspecting back.

When I went to visit Chris, I was prepared. I felt as if fate itself was almost nudging me towards murder now…

"You want me to reconsider the engagement?"

In the night of the second day, I made my move to Chris's room. Ever the gentleman, he let me inside with no hesitation.

"That's right. I thought you, of all people, could be reasonable about that."

"Does that mean you want Ms. Juliet to marry for love rather than politics?"

"If that's how you want to interpret it."

I had prayed that Chris would be open to discussion, unlike Morris. Soon after our chat began, however, my faint hopes would be dashed.

"Nonetheless, I have been named Mr. Aaron's successor. If he desires this engagement, I am obliged to comply. So I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid I must refuse your request…"

It was no use. My chances of convincing him were even worse than with Morris. I knew that our next moments together had to be his last. I had hoped that Morris would be the only blood on my hands…

"I see, how disappointing… Anyway, Chris, may I see your hand for a moment?"

"Yes, of course…"

"Thank you."

Pretending to take his hand in mine, I pricked Chris with the needle hidden in my ring. Applied to the tip was a poison carried by our family.

"Ms. Harriet, what did you just do?"

Those were the last words I heard Chris speak. Soon after, he began to lose bodily function, falling into a slump.

"…Goodbye."

After giving him a second poke for good measure, I quickly exited Chris's room.

"…It's a dangerous world, so I've always been certain to keep a bit of poison on me. But never did I think that I would end up using it on Chris like that…" Figuring I should lose with some grace, I told them my methods.

"You did all that for me, Mother…?"

Ah, that's right, I still need her to hear this… "Juliet, please understand you did nothing wrong. This was all my doing, and so I will pay the price." Thinking back, maybe if I had told my father about all this I'd have ended up marrying Aaron instead, and none of this would have happened… As this thought entered my mind, I suddenly locked eyes with Adamska, seeing his tormented expression.

"If only I had known what you were dealing with, I could have helped you find another way… I'm just as guilty as you are. I may have been too oblivious to share your suffering, but I can at least share your punishment."

"Thank you, Adamska. You truly were the best husband I could have asked for—" As I spoke, I stabbed myself using the hidden needle. It was entirely painless, perhaps because I was mentally prepared for it. This may be the end of my story, but I will be the one who writes it. Shortly after, I lost all strength in my legs and collapsed.

"No! She used the poison on herself!" Seeing the desperation on Hawthorne's face, regret flowed over me. I'm sure he'll never forget the sight of my dying face until the day he dies. To do this to someone who has loved me for so long… I truly am a wicked woman…

"Mama!"

"Mother!"

Cain and Eva ran up, calling to me. Ahh, what good kids. I'm not alone in the end, after all.

"Eva, Cain… I love you all so much. And Juliet… please don't make the same mistakes I did."

"Mother, wait! Don't go!" Juliet's grief-stricken cries reach my ears, but I can barely open my mouth.

"Goodbye…"

With the last of my strength, I utter that single word.

I may have made mistakes, but it wasn't such a bad life… No, it was the best I could have ever asked for.

"Our ride should be here soon. I'm afraid I must ask you all to get ready to leave," Ann hurried everyone in her usual flat tone.

"…Please… let me stay with Mother just a little longer."

"Mama…"

Eva and Cain stayed by the side of Harriet's corpse, wrapped gently in a bedsheet. Juliet watched her siblings cling to the sheets from a distance.

"I'm so sorry, everyone. I could have stopped her…" Hawthorne's tears seem to have now run dry. "As soon as I heard about the threatening letter, I had a feeling this might have been the case all along. I remember what she was like back then. Still, I couldn't bring myself to ask her about it. I know I should have said something, but I just couldn't bear the thought of her hating me."

"Please don't be so hard on yourself. This case would remain unsolved without your help," Hearing his confession, Holmes tried to soothe Hawthorne.

But Hawthorne's expression remained grim. "Me? No… I'm just a sniveling coward who left all the dirty work to you."

Dorothy listened to the conversation, her expression mirroring Hawthorne's. "I'm sad that Morris is dead, but… if I had been in Harriet's shoes, I think I might have done the same thing."

"Mommy? You're not gonna go bye-bye too, are you?"

Dorothy said no more, just hugging Laurie close.

"Excuse me, everyone. There's something I want to tell you." Cain stepped away from his mother, speaking to everyone in the room. I had already seen Cain's true self back in the forest, but everyone else was too shocked to do anything but listen to him.

As the rest of the room was distracted, Holmes whispered to me, "It looks like Cain has decided to come clean. Now that all eyes are on him, this seems it would be a good time for us to have a private chat. Do you have anything eating at you that you'd like to ask?"

"Why do you think I ended up in this 'dream' to begin with?" Now that the case has been closed, there's no need for me to hide my voice. It does still feel strange to be speaking with someone else's mouth, though.

"…Hmm. I am sure Da Vinci could explain the connection between you, Chaldea, and Rayshifting in magecraft terms, but I am afraid that is all a bit beyond my area of expertise, as it were. The best I can do under the circumstances is offer conjecture. I imagine that Rikka Fujimahr must have had a powerful reaction upon learning Juliet was engaged. Whether out of friendship, love, or even pity, she must have wished to help her with all her heart. From here on, my speculation takes a turn for the romantic, but… perhaps the moon saw that wish, and decided to grant it. Perhaps, in searching for someone with both the ability to help in this matter, and someone with a desire to so, it found you, and used Chaldea to forge some manner of connection between you, with moonlight as its conduit. Chaldea is no stranger to oddities of time and space, after all. And you did truly wish to help Juliet, no?"

"Of course." It was a desire I had down to my very heart.

"Ritsuka Fujimaru and Rikka Fujimahr… Perhaps you were chosen due to the fact that your names are so similar, as well. That, and your good-natured personalities."

As Holmes was joking about our connection, I felt myself becoming dizzy. Not just any normal vertigo, but the strange feeling you get right before you wake up from dreaming.

"It would seem you're about to lose consciousness again. I suppose that makes sense, as your role here is complete. By the time you wake up I will have already set off for the real Kogetsukan, but rest assured that I will return in a few days. Well now, it seems that Cain is saying something quite important indeed."

Having Holmes say this to me, I looked over to Cain to see him pleading with everyone.

"…I still hate this family, and this whole society. I'm scared of dying, too. But I decided to be brave. I see now that even small lies can have huge consequences. My mother

taught me that. That's why I'm telling you all, right here and now: I'm gonna change both the Violet and the Goldie families!"

Holmes whispered while he watched Cain, "Perhaps he really will succeed at changing the way both families live their lives. But that is no longer our concern."

…Right. I need to say goodbye to all these folks. Even if I were to pass them on the street in America, they'd have no way of knowing it was me. I can't bear not giving a proper farewell.

"Ah, yes. I believe this will be the last time you will see these people, so if there is anything you've been meaning to tell a certain someone, now is the time. Something that Rikka herself may have been wanting to say, or perhaps even should say." If this is the last chance I'll get to take part in this story… then I at least want to bring it to a proper end.

So, I quietly approached Juliet, who was staring blankly into the crowd at the corner of the room.

"What is it, Rikka? With Mother's death and Cain's revelation, I… I feel like I'm losing my mind…"

"…Yeah." My voice came out as a whisper. I'm so used to being silent around her, that it's tough to get myself to actually speak to her. Nonetheless, I was able to get out enough to keep the conversation going. "Come with me for a second," I didn't ask, but more so ordered. Taking the surprised Juliet's hand, I led her out into the hallway.

Juliet didn't protest, and instead followed behind willingly. "…What is it?" Juliet turned her face away and tried to say casually, clearly putting on an act.

"Well, first… I want to say sorry." I wanted to make her feel at ease, so I figured this would be a good place to start.

"Sorry…? What for?" Juliet still doesn't make eye contact, but since her ear is facing me, I know anything I say should still reach her.

The fact that I've been deceiving her has been eating away at me. "You know, Juliet…"

I wanted the next words out of my mouth to be 'I'm not really Rikka Fujimahr,' but I stopped myself before I could finish. If I'm just going to return to Chaldea, it would certainly make it easier on my own conscience to tell Juliet the truth. But what about Juliet? She would have to live with the fact that the one she relied on during such an important event in her life was an entirely different person than the girl she knew. If I'm not careful, I could irreparably damage her relationship with Rikka. This is something I need to take with me, even if it takes my whole life to forget how this makes me feel.

"What is it? Hurry up and say it…"

At Juliet's urging, I racked my mind quickly to come up with a reply. "…Sorry for making so much trouble for you." Despite coming up with it on the fly, it wasn't a lie. If I was able to figure out more on my own, maybe I could have averted this tragedy. "If I had been stronger, none of this would have happened."

Yet still, Juliet still wouldn't look at me. Thinking that was strange, I grabbed her shoulders and made her look in my direction.

She's… crying…

Until now, she had always been acting so strong, no matter what… As I thought, the case may be solved, but Juliet still needs emotional care. Holmes would be no help with this, which is why it's important we're alone. Still… I messed up. I didn't mean to make Juliet cry.

"No, Rikka… Aren't I the one who pulled you into all this?" As soon as she finished saying this, her tears started overflowing as if uncorked.

I couldn't tell if I should pretend I don't see her crying or if I should give her a tissue, so I just opened my arms to her.

Juliet jumped into me, burying her face into my chest. "Why don't you ever get angry? Why… Why don't you ever blame me? I've done nothing but cause trouble for you! There's… There's nothing good about being with me!" Juliet's warm tears began to soak into my skin.

"…That's not true, Juliet. Besides, we both made it out of this alive. Now we can go back to college together, right?"

Juliet looked up at me. Her face was soaked with tears, but still as beautiful as ever. "I've been so scared, you know… Scared that you'd leave like the rest, and I'd be all alone…" The last thing I want is to leave this place with her still scared of that.

"You were worried about that—?" The dizziness from earlier is getting worse. My body no longer obeys my commands. I can tell that the end is in sight. "Everything will be okay now, Juliet…" Just a little bit longer… even just a few seconds…

"'I'll always be here for you. Always and forever.'" Rikka Fujimahr's feelings push through me, finally saying what she had wanted to all along.

"Wh-what the, so sudden… But still… t-that really means a lot to me."

My vision was so hazy that I couldn't see her face, but somehow I still knew that Juliet had a tearful smile on her face. Placing my hand on the back of her head, I pull Juliet closer and gently stroke her hair.

Rikka Fujimahr… while I could never peer into your heart entirely to tell whether your affection for Juliet was friendship or true love, I know that you two will be together for the rest of your lives. Each step I took, I tried to take for the both of you.

Eventually, my blurred vision fades to black, and my strength is sapped from my body. Fortunately, I'm already in Juliet's arms for her to catch me.

"Rikka? What's wrong? Are you all right…?" Juliet seems panicked. Hugging tighter, she supports Rikka's limp body. "…Don't worry, I've got you. Now, and every step of the way, until the end of time…" Hearing those words from Juliet felt like a well earned reward at the end of this mysterious case.

Until death do you two part… I wish you a blissful life together.

And so ends the case of the murders at the Kogetsukan. I do I hope you enjoyed it.

I congratulate those of you who were able to arrive at the truth. But if you got it wrong, well... don't feel bad. If those who made mistakes were without worth, then I am afraid I would be the only one in the world with any merit to his name!

...That was a joke. Go on, laugh.

At any rate... even if one error or another led you to the wrong conclusion, no one can say you did not give it your all. That experience is your, and yours alone. If you enjoyed your experience with this novel at all over the time that you read it, that is enough in and of itself.

Nevertheless, this will conclude our latest case. Thank you for all your hard work, dear reader.